

# **The Dynamics of the Leader Follower Relationship**

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Business Administration.

**2010**

**Paul G Evans**

**Manchester Business School**

University of Manchester, Manchester Business School

Paul Gareth Evans

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The Dynamics of the Leader Follower Relationship

2010.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the forces that affect the influence relationship between leaders and followers in a public sector organisational setting. The study is motivated by the ambition of presenting a critical perspective of the social influence process referred to as leadership. The forces were explored by studying leaders and followers engaged in their normal work context.

A variation of a critical ethnographic methodology after Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2005) was utilised in order to identify and explain how the dynamics impacted upon the leader follower relationship. An extended period of fieldwork was conducted within a large unitary local government authority (referred to throughout the study as the ABC), during which observations and informal interviews with observed constituents were conducted and documentary evidence collected. Subsequently, an interpretive reflection of selected materials was undertaken in order to inform a critical perspective of the dynamics uncovered and the impact they had on the relationship between leaders and followers.

These dynamics are shown to be predominantly external to the leader follower dyad. The dynamics of ambiguity, environment, resources, symbiosis, politics and “playing the game” impact on the relationship to create an influence relationship distinct from that detailed in normative models of leadership.

The organisation comprises high levels of ambiguity; not least in the roles individuals play as leaders and followers. The transactional basis of the relationship with central government informs the basis of relationships between leaders and followers but in doing so also constricts the possibilities for leadership within the organisation. The environment is therefore an influential dynamic in leader follower relationships. Leaders and followers use the availability, acquisition and utilisation of resources to negotiate the position of their leadership and followership. Leaders are aware that they need followers as a resource and followers need leaders as they control access to resources. The relationship takes the form of a complex social symbiosis in which both component parts support each other. The relationship has a political bias. The use of politics underpins the independence of followers who are capable of acting in ways that can frustrate leaders. Finally, the two constituent parts of the relationship are engaged in playing a game, the rules of which are not explicitly stated, but can involve behaviour deemed to be illegitimate or non-sanctioned.

The normative position of followers as a largely homogenous group, docile and subject to the influences of leaders is shown to be unsubstantiated. This study concludes that followers have the capacity to act under their own agency toward their own goals and aspirations; and highlights the use of political behaviour to discredit leadership as an asymmetrical influence relationship. This study concludes by asserting that political behaviour corresponds to leadership and subsequently achieves its emancipatory intent.

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Preface pages</b>	
ABSTRACT .....	2
Contents .....	3
Declaration & Copyright.....	5
Dedication & Acknowledgments .....	6
List of figures .....	7
Glossary of terms.....	8
List of abbreviations .....	10
List of additional sources.....	12
Chapter One – Introduction .....	13
1.1 The problem under investigation .....	13
1.2 Aims and objectives of the research.....	15
1.3 The author .....	18
<b>Part One. Literature, context, methodology and design .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Chapter 2 - Leadership studies .....	23
2.1 Introduction – Why critical leadership research .....	25
2.2 The New Leadership approach .....	29
2.3 A Critique of leadership studies.....	36
2.4 An introduction to following.....	41
2.4.1 Followers as moderators of leadership.....	42
2.4.2 Followers as substitutes for leadership.....	43
2.4.3 Followers as constructors of leadership.....	44
2.5 Critical approaches to leadership .....	47
2.5.1 Identity, power and resistances .....	47
2.5.2 Political influences .....	48
2.5.4 Critical theory and leadership .....	53
2.6 Conclusions.....	57
Chapter 3 - Public sector context .....	59
3.1 Public sector reform.....	61
3.2 The impact of reform on the public sector .....	65
3.2.1 Between hierarchies and markets .....	65
3.2.2 The new public management.....	66
3.2.3 Public sector ethos and tradition.....	68
3.2.4 Ambiguity in local government.....	69
3.3 Conclusions.....	71
Chapter 4 - Methodological considerations .....	72
4.1. Emergence of the aims.....	72
4.2. Critical theoretical methodology .....	73
4.3 Research design .....	84
<b>Part Two. Field Research: Data Illustrations and Interpretations .....</b>	<b>93</b>
Chapter 5 - Introduction to Chapters 5 - 10 .....	94
5.1 'From Good to Great'.....	97
5.2 The illustration .....	103
5.3 Ambiguity.....	105
6.1 The audit and regulatory framework.....	111
6.2 The illustration .....	116
6.3 The environment .....	120
7.1 The corporate leadership team.....	124
7.2 The illustration .....	131
7.3 Acquisition and utilisation of resources .....	134
8.1 Accountable and responsible .....	138

8.2 The illustration .....	145
8.3 Symbiosis .....	146
9.1 A management meeting .....	150
9.2 The illustration .....	154
9.3 Politics .....	157
10.1 Meeting the Leader.....	162
10.2 The illustration .....	170
10.3 “Playing the game” .....	173
<b>Part Three. Discussion.....</b>	<b>177</b>
11.1 Leader follower dynamics.....	178
11.1.1 Ambiguity and the leader follower relationship. ....	179
11.1.2 Power and the leader follower relationship.....	185
11.1.3 Politics and the leader follower relationship. ....	192
11.2 Politics and leadership.....	199
11.2.1 The treatment of politics in leadership studies .....	199
11.2.2 Appreciating politics as leadership .....	200
11.3 Conclusion.....	204
11.4 Limitations of the study.....	205
<b>Part Four. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>209</b>
Chapter 12.....	210
12.1 General conclusions .....	211
12.2 Recommendations.....	217
12.3 Further research .....	218
References .....	220

**Words 82,282**

## Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

## Notes on copyright and ownership of intellectual property rights

- i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.
- ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made **only** in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trade marks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.
- iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/policies/intellectual-property.pdf>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library's regulations (see <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/library/aboutus/regulations>) and in The University's policy on presentation of Theses.

## **Dedication**

*"A little rebellion now and then is a good thing."*

**Thomas Jefferson**

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people have supported me in the production of this thesis, relatives, friends, colleagues, as well as local government officers and politicians – I salute you all.

Special thanks go to Barbara, Rhys and Rhian for their tolerance and understanding.

I would like to offer particular thanks to Michelle Lee for all her help, Tudor Rickards for getting me started in the first place, to John Hassard for guidance and encouragement and to Paula Hyde for all her generous and patient support in making sure I finished.

Without you all, I would never have completed this journey.

## **List of figures**

<b>1</b>	Figure 2.1	Full range leadership theory	32
<b>2</b>	Figure 2.2	Dimensions of the public sector transformational leadership model	33
<b>3</b>	Figure 2.3	Organisations and modes of political rule.	49
<b>4</b>	Figure 4.1	Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory	71
<b>5</b>	Figure 4.2	The four sociological research paradigms	72
<b>6</b>	Figure 4.3	Data sources	82
<b>7</b>	Figure 5.1	Table of information - ABC	91
<b>8</b>	Figure 6.1	The ABC planning framework.	107
<b>9</b>	Figure 10.1	Management structure of the ABC	158

**Glossary of terms.**

Audit Commission – A notionally independent government funded body charged with auditing services across local government

Financial Management Initiative – A government reform initiative outlined in the 1982 white paper. The initiative gave civil servants responsibility for the allocation of budgets (Cabinet Office, 1982).

Compulsory Competitive Tendering – a reform initiative of the Thatcherite government utilising competitive and internal markets, in which public sector services were opened up to private sector competition.

Concurrent delegation - As part of the restructuring of the authority chief officers were granted delegative power commensurate to Directors, referred to as concurrent delegation

Critical Theory (CT) – A perspective for undertaking social research drawn from and influenced by the Frankfurt School. Seen as a natural extension of a movement initiated in the enlightenment, CT attempts to uncover asymmetrical power relations and political inadequacies. It therefore has a strong emancipatory intent.

Dynamics – After Reeves (1970) those forces that are active in any direction whose sum reinforce or negate each other.

Leadership – defined as an influence relationship between leaders and followers.

National Audit Office.- National Body established to audit the accounts of government bodies

New Public Management (NPM) – An epoch of observed public sector reform in which public sector bodies have been reformed under direct influence from the experiences and practises of the private sector (James, 2004; Rhodes, 1991).

Normative Leadership – These are the models that have been derived from a functionalist research paradigm. The most significant of these models are the neo-charismatic models which include the full range leadership model (Avolio et al, 2004; Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994a) and the Public Sector Model of Transformational Leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004) (see Chapter 2. for a wider explanation)

One Council –The vision of the ABC under which all services and processes would fall into a single corporate identity. 'One Council' requires that service delivery should be equal across all service users.

Public Sector Ethos (PSE) – the existing paradigm of administration endorsed and practised by public sector employees. The PSE can be appreciated as a political



institution in its own right, determining practice and highly resistant to change (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996) (see chapter 3 for a wider discussion)

Strategic commissioning – The term used to refer to the authorities strategy of developing relationships with external bodies in order to provide council services. This strategy is directly informed by New Labour's policy of following a 'third way' between markets and traditional methods of public sector working.

Unitary Authority - A local authority where the County Council and District Council bodies have been merged to form one administrative body responsible for all local government functions within a geographic area.

### **List of abbreviations**

- ABC – The organisation under study. A large Northern Unitary Authority. ABC - A Big Council.
- ADS - Architect and Design Service. An Internal business unit commissioned to undertake the ABC's capital works.
- CA – Corporate Assessment. An external assessment by government auditors as to the corporate effectiveness of an authority. Primarily related to issues of financial management, compliance and effectiveness of policy and process. Conducted by members of the Audit Commission.
- CLT – Corporate Leadership Team. This is the principle Executive Committee of the Authority. Comprising Officers only, the committee consists of the 20 most senior officers of the Authority. It includes The Chief Executive and Deputy Executive, Assistant Chief Executive. The four service Directors, members of the Chief Executive's Unit and the Top management of 'Arms Length' organisations. The total membership comprises 20 officers. Previously known as the Corporate Management Team (CMT)
- CMT – Corporate Management Team. Reconstituted as the corporate leadership team (CLT)
- CPA - Comprehensive Performance Assessment. An external assessment by government auditors on the effectiveness of overall Council service provision.
- CT – see Critical Theory
- FRLT – Full Range Leadership Theory, a model of leadership (Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994a)
- HRC - Human Resource Consultancy. A national consulting company employed by the ABC to consult on matters regarding accountability and responsibility within the chief officer population
- ICC – International Consulting Company. This company was employed by the authority following successful intervention within operational departments, to engage with the organisation in order to implement its model for leadership, cultural and performance development.
- JAR – Joint Area Review. An external assessment by OFSTED of the ABC's Children's Services function.
- LCP1, LCP2 – These are leadership development programmes that were implemented by the authority in the years leading up to the fieldwork. The acronyms refer to "Leaders in the City Programme 1 and 2."

Lifelong learning network, APA process, LAC, LDD, CAMS, YOS –

These acronyms are related to children's services provision. The actual meaning of them is not known and they are included to indicate the complexity and type of language used by actors.

OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Body established to regulate and inspect service related to the care of children and young people, education and skills

PFI – Private Finance Initiative. Government strategy of utilising private sector money to finance public sector capital works.

PPPU – Public Private Partnership Unit. A department established within the Chief executives Unit designed to capture available funds through the government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme

PSE – see Public Sector Ethos.

RACI – A matrix devised by the HRC to assist in the consultancy work. The acronym stands for Responsibility, Accountability, Communication and Information.

### **List of additional sources**

This list contains those documentary sources used in the study that are publications developed and produced by the ABC.

#### **Corporate sources**

Council Business Plan 2008 to 2011, March 2008.

Corporate Leadership Team Minutes. July 2007.

#### **Other sources**

Cabinet Office. 1982. Efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service. Whitehall: The Stationary Office.

Cabinet Office. 1999. Modernising Government. Whitehall: The Stationary Office.

Cabinet Office. 2000a. Citizens First. Whitehall: The Stationary Office.

Cabinet Office. 2000b. Freedom of Information Act. Whitehall: The Stationary Office.

Cabinet Office. 2001a. Found at:

[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/news/press\\_releases/2001/010327.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/news/press_releases/2001/010327.aspx).

National Audit Act. 1983. c 44, 13 May 1983: The Stationery Office.

Performance and Innovation Unit. 2001. Strengthening leadership in the public sector. March 2001. Whitehall: The Stationery Office.

## **Chapter One – Introduction**

### **1.1 The problem under investigation**

During the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the interest in leadership gained fresh currency (Kellerman, 2008). There can be little doubt remaining concerning the general view that leadership is an essential commodity contributing to organisational performance. The Business Source Premier online database lists 22,814 separate references for leadership between 1970 and 2000. In the first 9 years of the new millennium, the same database lists 46,065 references. It is estimated that industry spends an average of \$50 billion annually on leadership development (Raelin, 2003). Whilst the resulting contributions have uncovered much concerning leadership there still exist many questions that are yet to be satisfactorily answered (House & Aditya, 1997; Parry & Bryman, 2006; Yukl, 2002).

As part of the reform of public services in the UK there have been increased calls for the implementation of greater levels of effective leadership within the public sector. The complexity of service provision can be appreciated as a series of difficult or intractable problems, and it has been posited that leadership may be the answer in helping to resolve these “wicked problems” (Grint, 2005a). The organisation under study had formally stated its leadership challenge under the initiative of “From Good to Great” (Council Business Plan, 2008 p.11).

A critical lens is used to examine the dynamics and their associated impacts on the relationship between leaders and followers in their normal work context. Critical theoretical approaches to social research generally advocate for the emancipation of groups marginalised within society (Thomas, 1993). Critical management research aims to follow the spirit of critical theoretical research but focuses on management phenomena (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a). The leadership literature is dominated by a functionalist research paradigm (Collinson, 2006) and, as such, has been based on a limiting set of assumptions representing Western industrial culture, specifically American in character (House & Aditya, 1997). This view of leadership suggests that followers within the relationship are primarily subject to the influence of the leader and that effective leadership is concerned with the mobilisation of followers to obtain a specified goal or goals (Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978).

Whilst the value of following is generally underplayed, some studies have acknowledged its importance (Chaleff, 2003; Collinson, 2006; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 1992, 2004; Lundin & Lancaster, 1990; Potter, Rosenbach, & Pittman, 2001; Raelin, 2004; Rosenau, 2004; Seteroff, 2003). Nevertheless, the dynamic influence processes through which the leader elicits and maintains follower support, particularly within a challenging bureaucratic organisational environment are little understood or commented upon (Avolio et al, 2004; Parry, 1998).

The dynamics of the relationship were studied by exploring the activities of leaders and followers in different work situations. Leaders in this study are considered to be those individuals that have a supervisory responsibility of others for the provision of a service, or part of a service. Followers are denoted to be those that are supervised by leaders. Dynamics are taken to be those forces that are active in any direction whose sum reinforces or negates each other (Reeves, 1970).

The contexts in which the relationships were played out were chosen because of the leadership potential and ease of access to each scenario. The leadership potential of scenarios was filtered by the likely occurrence of a) demonstrating leadership, or b) involving leadership. Observation of a particular scenario informed the next scenario to be observed through a desire to follow, question and interpret the leadership story as it unfolded.

This study presents interpretations of observations, interviews and documentation collected during a 16-month period of fieldwork within one of the UK's largest unitary authorities. Analysis of the evidence collected during the fieldwork is used to illuminate the leader follower relationship. This study is concerned therefore with the dynamics of the leader follower relationship and how the dynamics inform social influence processes referred to as leadership in practice.

## **1.2 Aims and objectives of the research**

The research aims are briefly outlined here accompanied by a short statement of how they were achieved.

- To explore the day to day work experiences of leaders and followers

Observations were made of leaders and followers in pursuit of their normal work routines.

- To identify and explore the main dynamics that comprise and affect the relationship between leaders and followers.

Interviews were conducted in order to explore with the principal actors observed concerning the depth of their work experiences. Understanding was gained in relation to the factors that shaped the practice of work and the relationship between leaders and followers.

- To interpret concepts and conversations concerning the leader follower relationship.

Follow up interviews were established to challenge 'playfully' some of the observations and detail of the interviews. A deeper exploration of themes was practised providing the jumping off point for further questioning and consolidation of understanding. The main themes were applied to work practice, and the relationship between leaders and followers was explored.

- To utilise the interpretations to suggest a framework of the dynamics of the leader follower relationship from a critical perspective.

Theoretical concepts were discussed and refined with leaders and followers in order to produce the findings of this study.

### 1.3 The significance of the research

Despite the popularity and availability of leadership related material there remains a significant shortfall in knowledge about the concept of leadership. (House & Aditya, 1997; Parry & Bryman, 2006; Yukl, 2002). Grint (2005b) states the view that it is not possible to be a leader and a reader and points towards a disparity in understanding and practice, between academics and the field of leadership studies on the one hand and leadership practitioners and organisational development managers on the other. This however does not appear to have diminished the currency of leadership in terms of its perceived value upon organisational performance. This view is reinforced by populist management textbooks and hagiographic biographies of “celebrity” business leaders (Calás & Smircich, 1991), and has paved the way toward the dominant position maintained by heroic neo-charismatic leaders (Beyer, 1999). This school of leadership theorising referred to as a “messianic discourse” has come to represent the normative position of leadership study (Western, 2008). Driven by the impact of new public management (Rhodes, 1991), leadership models have been derived and implemented within various public sector contexts (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004). The successes of such initiatives have been varied (Blackler, 2006).

The results of the study by Blackler resonate with the opinions of many of the key contributors concerning the state of leadership research and the extent to which knowledge has been gained. Much of the concern relates to two distinct issues.

The first relates to issues of definition; could it be possible that, as a consequence of widespread variation of definition, leadership scholars are not studying leadership but some other related phenomenon (Rost, 1993). In reviewing leadership definitions found in the literature, (Yukl, 2002) concludes that most leadership scholars would agree that leadership comprises an influence relationship between leaders and followers. In contrast to the mainstream focus on leaders as individuals and their behaviours, traits and competencies; critical theoretical interpretations of leadership focus on exploring the relations between leaders and followers and appreciate leadership to be a socially constructed influence process (Collinson, 2006; Grint, 2005a; Parry, 1998).

Secondly, it has been stated that lack of progress may be related to the research design that has traditionally dominated leadership studies.

*“It may even be suggested that the answer, after considering the enormous resources in terms of money, time, energy and talent spent on (neo-) positivist leadership research as a gigantic experiment testing whether (neo-) positivist methodology works or not, should be no.”*

**Alvesson (1996, p.457).**



Conventional approaches are generally taken from the fields of social psychology and management studies and tend therefore to favour positivistic hypothesis testing methods (Rost, 1993). It is claimed that this has led to a subtle re-writing of existing theory to incorporate new nuances and different terminology but remains inherently contained in the previous literature (Western, 2008). The effectiveness of such methods has been questioned and increasingly more researchers are calling for the application of alternative qualitative methods (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, 1996; Calás & Smircich, 1991).

Where conducted, critical approaches to leadership studies have sought to challenge the normative position of leadership as residing solely within the formal leader (Collinson, 2006; Grint, 2005b; Western, 2008), and have gone as far as to undermine the traditionally held assumption of leadership as a "real" phenomenon (Alvesson, 1996, 2001; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992).

- This study acknowledges the criticisms concerning the weaknesses of leadership study and through the adoption of a critical perspective contributes to the literature in a number of ways. Through standing outside of the normative functional leadership conceptualisations the study provides a richer and deeper interpretation of the empirical material,
- Responding to calls for the use of alternate research methodologies. This study adopts a qualitative methodological position (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, 1996),
- Illuminating the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and followers,
- Making interpretations from a critical theoretical standpoint relating to the illustrations given; and makes conclusions concerning the complexity of leadership practice in an organisational context.

### **1.3 The author**

I have been a professional general manager in both the private and public sectors since June 1993 when I qualified with an MBA from the Manchester Business School.

During my professional life, I have witnessed the growth in importance of 'leadership' in relation to my own experiences as a general manager. I was appointed as Chief Executive for an NDPB of the Department Culture Media and Sport in Oct 2003; a post I fulfilled for 5 years.

During this time, the levels of scrutiny that I came under as a leader, a manager and an individual by Government, employees and staff intensified exponentially. As scrutiny grew, so did my discomfort at being held as a public property. I was required to attend leadership seminars organised by the sponsoring government department and increasingly the Board of Trustees directed me to improve my levels of leadership for the betterment of the organisation.

During this time, it became clearer to me that an insistence for more leadership from individuals was at odds with a public sector motivated by benchmarking against ability to deliver targets. Objectives through stated strategies became more intricate and theoretically more quantifiable as the essential dynamics of leadership became correspondingly more intangible and more divorced from organisational and individual performance.

As I left the post in 2008, I have reflected upon my own leadership and these reflections have in turn been influenced by the study I have undertaken. The call for a form of leadership reflected by instrumental reason does not mirror the organisational world I experienced for 15 years as a senior executive. My world contained a myriad of ambiguities, complexities and emotions and consequently appeared anything but rational – leadership theory and practice should be representative of this.

## **Organisation of the thesis**

The study is organised under the following chapter headings. A brief description of the contents of each chapter is provided here.

### **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the problem under study. It details the aims and objectives of the study and finally makes comment on the significance of the study.

### **Part One Literature, Context, Methodology and Design**

#### **Chapter 2 Leadership studies**

This chapter outlines the literature on leadership studies. The literature is presented in three sections. The first outlines the literature from the school of New Leadership. Following this is a critique of the literature from a historical and methodological perspective. The second section outlines literature that takes followers as its primary object of study. The third section outlines literature that supports a critical perspective of leadership and concludes with those studies conducted on leadership from a critical theoretical platform.

#### **Chapter 3 The organisation in context**

This chapter establishes the context within which the leader follower relationship is conducted. It tracks the history of reform and the prevailing currents of research.

#### **Chapter 4 Methodological considerations**

This chapter deals with methodological considerations. It outlines the critical theoretical perspective before outlining the research design.

### **Part Two Field Research: Data Illustrations and Interpretations**

#### **Chapter 5** This chapter begins by outlining the presentation and interpretation of the empirical material before setting out the first illustration

##### **Illustration 1**

Section One - "From Good to Great"

This illustration deals with a leadership development seminar held within the organisation referred to internally as 'From Good to Great'. This illustration was chosen because of the subject matter of the seminar.

## Section Two - Ambiguity

This section of the chapter presents the interpretations of the illustration before concluding that ambiguity is a dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

### **Chapter 6      Illustration 2**

#### Section One - The Audit and Regulatory Framework

This illustration deals with a meeting to establish the Corporate and Children's Services assessments. This illustration was chosen because it illustrates the context within which leader follower relations are conducted.

#### Section Two - Environment

In this section, interpretations related to context were made to conclude that the environment is a dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

### **Chapter 7      Illustration 3**

#### Section One - The corporate leadership team

This illustration concerns a management team meeting chaired by the Chief Executive. The corporate leadership team is the most senior, officer committee in the organisation. This illustration was chosen because of the interplay between leaders and followers.

#### Section Two - Resources

This section draws interpretations from the team meeting to conclude that the acquisition, allocation and utilisation of resources are a dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

### **Chapter 8      Illustration 4**

#### Section One – Accountable and Responsible

This illustration focuses on a Human Resources led initiative concerning a management accountability matrix. This is not an illustration as such but is a composite of a number of observations. It has been presented in this way best to illustrate the actions of leader and followers.

#### Section Two - Symbiosis

The interpretations made in this section conclude that leaders and followers are engaged in a symbiotic relationship and the nature of the relationship comprises an important dynamic between the two.

**Chapter 9      Illustration 5.**

Section One - A Management Meeting

This illustration refers to a Directors' management team meeting. This illustration was chosen because of the interplay between leaders and followers.

Section Two, Politics

The interpretations in this section lead to the conclusion that politics is an important dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

**Chapter 10      Illustration 6.**

Section One – A Meeting with the Leader

This illustration presents meetings between elected politicians and senior managers of the ABC. It was chosen because of the interplay between leaders and followers.

Section Two - Playing the Game

The interpretations made in this section demonstrate that both leaders and followers are engaged in what is referred to as a game. Playing the game therefore comprises the dynamic in this instance.

**Part Three      Discussion**

This chapter is in two sections. The first brings together the identified dynamics from the previous six chapters to demonstrate how they impact upon and influence each other. The second section explores the limitations of the study.

**Part Four      Conclusions**

This final chapter explores the extent to which the aims and objectives of the study have been achieved before making recommendations for further study.

**Part One.**

**Literature, context, methodology and design**

## **Chapter 2 - Leadership studies**

### **Overview**

This chapter is concerned with the literature that relates to leaders, followers and the dynamics of the influence relationship theorised to exist between the two. The general literature on leadership studies will not be covered here in its entirety as space does not allow and it has been well covered in other sources (Please refer to, (Bryman, 1996; House & Aditya, 1997; Parry & Bryman, 2006; Rickards & Clark, 2006; Yukl, 2002). Despite this restriction the chapter remains quite large and is therefore organised into separate sections. The concluding section brings the literature together and outlines its significance for the aims and objectives of the research study.

### **Section 2.1 Introduction**

This section introduces the leadership literature and elaborates on the potential contribution a critical theoretical view of leadership may bring to what appears to be an already congested subject. The foundations of the critical theoretical perspective and its approach to management studies are outlined.

### **Section 2.2 The New Leadership approach**

This section reviews the literature of the New Leadership School and covers the principal theories and theoretical developments. The section asserts that the neo-charismatic theories developed and supported by the school have come to represent a normative understanding of leadership theory and practice. This section demonstrates how a normative appreciation of leadership is represented by theories applicable to the UK public sector.

### **Section 2.3 A critique of leadership studies**

This section comprises a critique of the literature. Based upon the contribution of Rost (1993), this section makes three broad criticisms of the literature asserting that these shortfalls have compounded the lack of progress concerning leadership understanding. Firstly, that a historical portrayal of leadership studies supports a view of progress; secondly, that confusion concerning definition has retarded understanding and progress and, thirdly, adoption of functionalist methodologies have effectively reduced the complexity of the phenomenon to the detriment of progress.

The conclusions to this section outlines the possibility of alternative perspectives of leadership by introducing leadership approaches that have currency and are differentiated from the New Leadership School. These theories remain rooted in the functionalist paradigm and are essentially leader-centric in their construction. Whilst critical of the models of leadership outlined in prior sections, they share epistemological and methodological antecedents with the theories they criticise. From a critical theoretical

perspective, these post-charismatic theories continue to privilege the position of leader over the follower maintaining the traditional dominance of leaders and their leadership.

## **Section 2.4 Introduction to followers**

Contrary to those theories outlined in the previous sections, this section focuses on the role of the follower in the leader follower relationship. An increased interest in follower-centric models of leadership has raised the currency of followers in leadership studies. The following three sections therefore contain a review of leadership theories from the perspective of followers.

### **Section 2.4.1 Followers as moderators of leadership**

This section deals with follower-centric theories in which followers are seen as moderators of leaderships. This view of leadership accords a primarily passive role to followers as the recipients of leadership influence.

#### **Section 2.4.2 Followers as substitutes of leadership**

This section introduces literature concerned with followers as substitutes for leadership. This perspective can be appreciated as an extreme version of followers as moderators of leadership as it introduces increased independence on the part of followers.

#### **Section 2.4.3 Followers as constructors of leadership**

This section introduces the most radical of the follower perspectives of leadership. These theories show how followers construct or represent leaders and comprise the most radical of the three follower-centric perspectives of leadership. The section outlines the literature related to the romance of, and the construction of, identity in leadership processes. This second approach has gained most interest from critical theoretical scholars.

## **Section 2.5 Critical approaches to leadership studies**

This section reviews the literature of critical theoretical leadership studies; introducing issues of power and politics to the leadership context.

## **Section 2.6 Conclusions**

This final section draws the literature together in order to draw conclusions about the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and followers as asserted in the extant literature. This part concludes by relating the research question to the literature and establishes the framework for study.



## **2.1 Introduction – Why critical leadership research**

This section introduces the leadership literature and elaborates on the contribution a critical theoretical view of leadership brings to what appears to be an already congested subject. The foundations of the critical theoretical perspective and its approach to management studies are also outlined.

Alvesson and Willmott (2001) maintain that management is treated as a neutral activity due to the mistaken assumption that management is holistic in its affects and works to the benefit of all in the organisation. The classic manager therefore is an essential component of the rational system as an administrator of efficiency. The authors' objective is to reinstate the political and social into management theory, challenging the technocratic and functional dominance that undermines the emancipatory potential within the workplace. The leadership literature has followed this tradition and is therefore informed by a techno-rationalist and positivist agenda to favour a dominant management perspective. It is difficult therefore to differentiate between the 'efficient manager' and 'effective leader' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001).

Like many areas of management studies, research on leadership has been dominated by neo-positivist / normative assumptions, together with a reliance on rules and procedures for developing objective results and practice (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a). As demonstrated below the results of many thousands of leadership studies have proved disappointing. It is asserted that much of the leadership literature represents an 'insider view' (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a; Western, 2008), in which increased variation and confusion has been received with general disdain, ensuring that the findings do not receive the attention needed in order to develop a more complex and richer understanding of leadership (Alvesson, 1996).

The application of a critical theoretical approach to leadership demands that attention is given to identifying some of the undercurrents, subtleties, historical and social trends in which leaders operate (Western, 2008). Included within this approach are the different voices that share different perspectives of the phenomenon. In this way the 'frozen reality' that may comprise leadership can be defrosted allowing established norms to be challenged and greater understanding to be achieved (Alvesson, 1996).

Critical perspectives are those that challenge the traditional orthodoxies of leadership studies in that they challenge the dominant view that leaders are those in charge and followers are those influenced by leaders (Jackson & Parry, 2008). They illustrate how underlying assumptions and structural features influence organisational life and how leadership plays its part in this scenario (Western, 2008).

Organisations have become a revered feature of social life, superseding as they have the political and social institutions that were hitherto fundamental in the vital socialising

process required by society. Morgan (1997) maintains that organisations have a strong tendency toward domination, leading to the view that organisations comprise one of modernity's most powerful tools of social coercion and dominance of society. This does not mean however that the dynamics of power and influences inherent within organisations need always be a negative. Critical theoretical perspectives on the dynamics of social relations can help promote social cohesion through the illumination of potentially harmful socialising processes (Western, 2008).

It is not claimed that a critical theoretical approach has a monopoly on truth, but that it may provide a valuable resource toward stimulating and influencing the development of debate, research and practice of leadership in organisations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001). This perspective has been generally neglected within leadership studies and could be utilised to develop a more holistic appreciation of leadership processes.

A principal objective of critical theoretical studies is to challenge deeply held convictions within society because such convictions stand in the way of allowing a more emancipated society. Attention is given therefore to the development of critical theory and an overview of the emancipatory goals of the approach.

#### **Development of critical theory and central themes.**

With referral to Alvesson and Willmott (2001) this section will provide an overview of the main themes of critical theory (CT).

The term critical theory as used in this study refers to the influences and works of the Frankfurt School. At the core of the school is a concern to develop a more rational, enlightened society through a process of critical reflection upon the organisation and efficacy of existing institutions and ideologies. Whilst the school demonstrates considerable diversity, there is a common desire to mobilise critical reasoning in order to transform oppressive features of the modern world through non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic politics. The Frankfurt school introduced the possibility of subjecting established dogmas to critical scrutiny paving the way for emancipatory change.

CT has its roots in the Enlightenment, when knowledge based upon empirical observation began to challenge established dogmas protected by tradition and religion. The scholars of the enlightenment sought to establish knowledge concerning the natural world based upon a rational, scientific basis. The understanding of scientific knowledge and 'rationality' advanced by these thinkers was positivistic or *non-dialectical* (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001 p.73) That is to say that reality was conceptualised as an ahistorical object world, that exists externally to, and independently of, the scientists' methods of representing this reality. Later the Young Hegelians – notably Marx and Feurbach - challenged the concept of dualism with the historically grounded conception of *dialectical*

production or reproduction of social reality in which subjects and objects are intertwined and mutually constitutive of each other; and this comprises the foundations of CT.

### **The Frankfurt School**

Felix Weil established the Frankfurt School in the 1920s and, after a relatively inauspicious start, the school came to prominence under the guidance of Max Horkheimer in the 1930s. The school aimed to combine social science and philosophy into a politically and practically committed social philosophy. This mission involved a fundamental questioning of the claim that social science can produce objective value-free knowledge about social reality. Instead of being obliged to discover universal, law-like patterns of social behaviour, members of the school sought to show how patterns of activity (e.g. consumerism, authoritarianism) are constructed within specific historical and societal contexts, and that the methods of representing these patterns are themselves inextricably linked within these contexts. These patterns and methods should be perceived as an historical movement and not a final form of society or science. Underpinning this was a dialectically inspired concern to engender reflection upon, and emancipation from, the contradictions and restrictions inherent in capitalist societies. This should not be read to say that members of the school had overt leftist political views affiliated to the left-Hegelians and Marx. The school declined to align themselves with the interests of orthodox Marxism but did identify with the critical emancipatory intent of the Marxist tradition.

The rise of Fascism in Nazi Germany of the 1930s and 40s provided many examples of institutions and ideologies that suppressed and impeded an emancipated citizenship. However, as the grip of Nazi Germany tightened over the intelligentsia of the country, many of the members of the school went into exile in the USA. Here they became exposed to, and impressed by, if not also traumatised by, the hyper-materialistic culture of the most advanced capitalist democracy. This experience provoked fresh processes of critical reflection upon the seductive powers of consumerism. Members of the school took particular interest in the affects of mass culture, especially the production and distribution of news and entertainment, which is seen to exert a numbing and homogenising effect upon the consciousness of the population, inhibiting reflection and normalising conformity. That is not to say that media is inherently pacifying or evil. Clearly, it possesses the potential to be positive, through educational purposes for example. However, the emancipatory capacities appeared to have been subsumed by the commercial and ideological priorities of consumer capitalism.

Later theorists of the CT tradition have taken seriously the view that the work of earlier critical theorists lacked any rational basis for their views and thus could be said to be little more than a pretentious moralising by privileged intellectuals. Some contributors in particular have embarked upon a programme intended to establish the rational

foundations of CT. Most radical of these contributions is the conjecture that the structure of human communication at once anticipates and provokes an emancipatory impulse toward the development of a more rational society, in which communication is no longer distorted by the influences of power and domination.

It is worth noting that many traditions of social analysis are highly resistant, if not antagonistic, toward any form of criticism (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001 p.88). The difficulties in making sense of the development of welfare capitalism and the expansion of consumerism paved the way toward CT's openness to a range of intellectual influences. Generally, critical approaches draw attention to the asymmetries of power relations to explore possible forms of transformation or emancipation. There is however no definitive critical position as writers draw upon a plurality of perspectives (Collinson, 2005).

## **2.2 The New Leadership approach**

By the 1980s leadership studies experienced a general malaise acknowledged by some of its principle contributors (Mintzberg, 1982; Yukl, 1989). According to Bryman (1996) a general shot in the arm was provided by a group of theories that appeared in the 1980s by signalling a new way of conceptualising and researching leadership. Collectively these theories became referred to as the school of New Leadership (Bryman, 1992.). The various labels employed revealed a conception of the leader as someone capable of defining organisational reality through an articulation of a vision, which is a reflection of how he or she defines the mission of the organisation and the values that underpin it (Parry & Bryman, 2006). Although criticised for repackaging existing theory (Western, 2008), collectively the New Leadership school has developed a resonance amongst scholars and practitioners alike that has meant that its theoretical underpinnings have come to represent a normative understanding of leadership (Western, 2008).

### **The theories of the New Leadership approach**

During the 1980s, leadership researchers became very interested in the revitalisation and transformation of the fortunes of organisations through what was perceived as charismatic leadership. This interest can possibly be attributed to the declining performances of US corporations when compared to increased global competition, particularly from Japan. Yukl (1989) asserts that the interplay between transformational and charismatic processes and the positive and negative effects of those processes is an area of great interest and potential. The New Leadership approach seemed to tie in to an increasing appetite for stories about heroic Chief Executives and a growing awareness of organisations and their missions. New Leadership can be seen as a cause, symptom and consequence of this self-reflection (Bryman, 1996).

Transformational leadership refers to those processes that influence major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organisation members and the building of commitment for the organisation's mission, objectives and strategies, recognised by the outputs of the transformed organisation. Transformational leadership involves influence by a leader on subordinates, resulting in the empowerment of subordinates to influence the transformation of the organisation. Transformational leadership is therefore seen as a shared process, involving the actions of leaders throughout the organisation and not just those actions of the foremost hierarchical leader (Burns, 1978).

Charismatic leadership refers to the Weberian perception that a leader possesses some form of divinely inspired gift. Followers not only trust and respect the leader but they also idolise and, to an extent, worship the leader as a hero (Bass, 1985). According to House (House, 1977) the indicators of charismatic leadership include the followers' trust in the correctness of the leader's views and unquestioning acceptance, affection and obedience. As opposed to transformational leadership, the focus here is on the individual

leader.

Both transformational and charismatic theories of leadership are broader in scope than those theories that preceded them and as such represent an important step toward the integration of the leadership literature (Yukl, 1989). The major theories within this area of New Leadership are briefly outlined below.

### **House's Charismatic Leadership Theory (1977 )**

This theory specifies indicators of charismatic leadership that involve the attitudes and perceptions of followers about the leader. The theory also deals with leader traits that increase the likelihood of being perceived as charismatic including a strong need for power, high self-confidence, and assured beliefs. Behaviours of charismatic leaders include impression management, articulation of an appealing vision and communication of high expectations and expressions of confidence in follower ability. In addition, charismatic leaders set examples, through their own behaviour, for followers and can act to arouse follower motives appropriate to the task.

Bass (1985) noted some conceptual limitations to the theory and recommended extending it to include additional traits, behaviours, indicators of charisma and facilitating conditions. He proposed that charismatic leaders were more likely to appear in crises where formal authorities have failed and traditional values and methods have fallen under scrutiny.

### **Conger & Kanungo's charismatic theory (1987)**

The version of charismatic theory proposed by Conger and Kanungo (1987) is based on the assumption that charisma is an attributed phenomenon. Followers attribute charismatic qualities to a leader, based on their observations of the leader's behaviour and outcomes associated with it. Such behaviours are not assumed present in every charismatic leader to the same extent, and the relative importance of each behaviour can vary, dependent upon the situation. The behaviours include the following - enthusiastic advocacy of a compelling vision differentiated from the status quo and yet still within follower tolerance, making self sacrifices and risking personal loss in the perusal of the vision, and undertaking unconventional actions in order to achieve the vision. Traits enhancing the attribution of charisma include self-confidence, impression management skills, high cognitive ability, and social empathy required to understand the needs and values of followers.

Attributed charisma is more likely for a leader who relies on expert and referent power to influence followers as opposed to authority and participation. Charismatic leaders are likely to emerge when there is a crisis requiring major change or followers are dissatisfied with the status quo. However, in the absence of genuine crisis a leader may be able to create dissatisfaction in order to demonstrate expertise in dealing with the problem in

unconventional ways.

### **Burns's theory of transforming leadership (1978)**

The theory of "Transforming Leadership" was developed from skilled observation of a number of political leaders. Burns (1978) described leadership as being a process of evolving inter-relationships in which leaders influence followers and are influenced in turn to modify their behaviour as they meet responsiveness or resistance. Transforming leadership is viewed as a micro-level influence process between individuals and a macro-level process of mobilising power to change structures and institutions. According to Burns, leaders seek to increase followers' consciousness by appealing to their higher ideals and values and not baser instincts. Followers are thus elevated away from everyday selves to better selves. Transforming leadership can be exhibited by anyone in an organisation regardless of position as it may involve the influencing of peers or superiors as well as subordinates.

Burns contrasts transforming leadership with transactional leadership, in which followers are motivated primarily by appeals to their own self-interest. He also differentiates transforming leadership from influence based on bureaucratic authority which emphasises power, rules and traditions.

### **Bass's theory of transformational/transactional leadership (1985)**

Bass's approach draws heavily on the work of Burns, but goes much further in two respects (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bass, 1985). First, as opposed to the opposite ends of a continuum, Bass sees transformational and transactional leadership as separate dimensions. The ideal approach is to demonstrate elements of both forms of leadership. Second, in contrast to Burns's generalised style of discussing the two types of leadership Bass has specified the individual components and developed a series of quantifiable indicators for each component.

- Transformational leadership consists of four components:
  - Idealised influence or charisma, the development of vision in turn promoting pride, respect and trust.
  - Inspiration, motivating through aspiration toward higher expectations, the modelling of appropriate behaviours, and the use of symbols.
  - Individualised consideration, the allocation of time to followers demonstrating respect and giving responsibility.
  - Intellectual stimulation, the continual challenge to followers with ideas and approaches.
- Transactional leadership is conceptualised in terms of two components:

- Contingent rewards, the reward to followers for attainment of tasks and targets,
- Management by exception, is seen as the taking of action when things are not going to plan.

Research findings on the model have shown charisma and inspiration to be the two components of leader behaviour that are most strongly associated with outcomes such as the performance of subordinates (Bryman, 1996). Charisma, inspiration, individualised

**Idealised Influence (charisma)** : Envisioning a valued future, articulating how to reach it, sets high standards and uses self as an example that followers identify with and wish to follow.

**Inspirational Motivation**: The leader provides simplified and symbolic appeals in support of goals.

**Intellectual Stimulation**: Encouraging followers to address old problems, be more creative and innovative

**Individualised Consideration**: Treating each follower individually with different needs for development and support.

**Contingent Reward**: Reward or promise of reward was provided in exchange for meeting standards.

**Management by Exception** : Active or Passive. Corrective action in light of failure to meet standards (correction, negative feedback, reproof, sanctions and disciplinary action)

**Laissez Faire**: Unconcerned, procrastination and avoidance of issues and decisions.

consideration and intellectual stimulation interact to influence changes in followers and the combined effects distinguish between transformational and charismatic leaders.

Transformational leaders seek to inspire and elevate followers; with charismatic leaders the opposite sometimes occurs (Yukl, 1989).

In later theorising the transformational leadership model was developed because of widespread empirical studies, and full range leadership theory (FRLT) was conceived (Avolio, 1991; Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994a). A distinction can be made between four aspects of transformational leadership, namely idealised influence (formerly charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Three aspects of transactional leadership are added to the model, specifically, contingent reward, active management-by-exception and passive management-

**Figure 2.1 Full range leadership theory (Bass, 1999).**

by-exception. In the major variation away from the previous model is a classification for those leaders who abstain from the influencing of subordinates. This is referred to as laissez-faire leadership. This model is depicted in figure 2.1 above.



## Leadership in the public sector

The foundations of the aforementioned studies have provided the conceptual base for an application to the public sector. Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2004) have maintained that they have further developed models in response to criticism that the models of the New Leadership lack the complexity to be applicable to the UK public sector. (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005).

The authors, having extensively researched and collated the views of followers in the UK

### Leading & Developing Others

**Showing Genuine Concern:** Genuine interest in staff as individuals; values their contributions; develops their strengths; coaches, mentors; has positive expectations of what their staff can achieve

**Enabling:** Trusts staff to take decisions/initiatives on important matters; delegates effectively; develops staff's potential

**Being Accessible:** Approachable and not status-conscious; prefers face-to-face communication; accessible and keeps in-touch

**Encouraging Change:** Encourages questioning traditional approaches to the job; encourages new approaches/solutions to problems; encourages strategic thinking

### Personal Qualities

**Being Honest & Consistent:** Honest and consistent in behaviour; more concerned with the good of the organization than personal ambition

**Acting with Integrity:** Open to criticism and disagreement; consults and involves others in decision-making; regards values as integral to the organization

**Being Decisive, Risk-taking:** Decisive when required; prepared to take difficult decisions, and risks when appropriate

**Inspiring Others:** Charismatic; exceptional communicator; inspires others to join them

**Resolving Complex Problems:** Capacity to deal with a wide range of complex issues; creative in problem-solving

### Leading the Organization

**Networking & Achieving:** Inspiring communication of the vision of the organization/service to a wide network of internal and external stakeholders; gains the confidence and support of various groups through sensitivity to needs, and by achieving organizational goals.

**Focusing Team Effort:** Clarifies objectives and boundaries; team-orientated to problem-solving and decision-making, and to identifying values.

**Building Shared Vision:** Has a clear vision and strategic direction, in which s/he engages various internal and external stakeholders in developing; draws others together in achieving the vision.

**Supporting a Developmental Culture:** Supportive when mistakes are made; encourages critical feedback of him/herself and the service provided.

**Facilitating Change Sensitively:** Sensitivity to the impact of change on different parts of the organization; maintains a balance between change and stability.

**Figure 2.2 Dimensions of the public sector transformational leadership Model**  
(Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004)

public sector, arrived at 14 dimensions that comprise a public sector transformational model outlined in figure 2.2 above (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004). This model is differentiated from other transformational

models by the “nearness” of the leader to followers and is built upon the foundation of work concerning social and leader distance (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002; Napier & Ferris, 1993; Shamir, 1995), and as such is very closely related to work concerning self-leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002).

Despite the assertion of the UK government (P.I.U. 2001) and others (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004; Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005) of the value of leadership to the UK public sector, studies have demonstrated that the issues related to leadership and performance of the public sector are highly complex and contradictory. In a major study by Blackler (2006) the author demonstrates that the image of empowered proactive leaders within UK public sector organisations fails to reflect reality. The evidence demonstrates that Public Sector Chief Executives had become little more than conduits to a politicised centre. Critical to this is the issue of bureaucratic discretion, which resides with central government thus denying senior managers the leadership role (Van Wart, 2003). Subsequently the author asserts that the study of leadership within the UK public sector cannot be divorced from a broader study of the institutions of state (Blackler, 2006).

In a study concerning leadership at differing levels of the organisation hierarchy, Kan and Parry (2004) recorded similar phenomena, in that complex cultural and societal factors combined to repress the leadership capacity of those under study. Fundamental to this repression is the issue of paradox and how individuals respond to paradoxical situations defined as inconsistencies and contradictions in the work place. In identifying the paradox, leaders either reconciled or legitimised the paradox in question. Reconciling paradox tended to reflect some of the criteria of sanctioned political activity identified by Zanzi and O'Neill (2001), whilst legitimising paradox concerned the use of political tactics identified as non sanctioned in the same study.

## **Conclusion**

In an overview of the New Leadership developments Bryman (1996) warns against exaggerating the differences between it and previous approaches. The New Leadership approach is wedded to an overtly rational model of organisational behaviour, and the approach appears to be associated with a specific quantitative research methodology (Bryman, 1996; Western, 2008; Yukl, 1999). Despite the view of the principal theoretical contributors of the New Leadership school that their approaches are distinct, others assert that the approaches congregate around three thematic principles: a focus on heroic leaders; a preoccupation with leadership at the highest levels of organisation; and a focus on individuals as opposed to groups (Jackson & Parry, 2008; Parry & Bryman, 2006). This has led to the suggestion that the theories of New Leadership should be considered collectively and have subsequently been referred to as neo-charismatic theories of leadership (Beyer, 1999; House & Aditya, 1997).

Nevertheless, well-intentioned criticisms of the New Leadership school do not appear to have significantly damaged the currency with which it is held (House & Aditya, 1997; Parry & Bryman, 2006). Western (2008) maintains that the dominant normative position of New Leadership theory is maintained by two strong fundamental urges. The first is that changing social, political and economic conditions appear to predicate the intervention of a heroic leader in order to resolve the 'wicked problems' evident in the contemporary social world (Grint, 2005a). The second urge is a requirement to keep the leadership development industry afloat, supported on the one hand by individual leaders required to demonstrate their leadership impact immediately and promoted on the other by consultancies, training companies and business schools marketing New Leadership as a form of easily assimilable commodity (Mintzberg, 2004).

## **2.3 A Critique of leadership studies**

The following three segments detail concerns related to progress within leadership studies. The first two are attributed to Joseph Rost's (1993) seminal study entitled "Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Principal among Rost's concerns is a lack of definition within the studies undertaken and a concentration on an historical view of leadership that purports to demonstrate the verisimilar progress of leadership understanding. The third segment gives an account of concerns pertaining to the research methodologies utilised in leadership studies.

### **2.3.1 Definition**

One of Rost's criticisms relates to lack of definition within leadership studies (Rost, 1993). Whilst a general definition of leadership is not a concern from a critical theoretical perspective, a perceived lack of rigour as identified by Rost and exemplified in many scholarly works only serves to illustrate the weakness in understanding the phenomenon.

Rost maintains that a lack of definition as to what constitutes leadership is the root cause for the lack of progress in leadership studies. If you cannot define it how can you study it? As an example of the definitional confusion that exists within leadership studies Yukl states that "the numerous definitions of leadership that have been proposed appear to have little in common with each other." (Yukl, 1989). Furthermore, the plethora of definitions and the volume of scholarly works that do not define the area of study, 'leadership', only serve to frustrate the possibilities of progress being made. In this shortcoming there exists the likelihood that the New Leadership school is ultimately undermined by the fact that the majority of contributors place no emphasis on the nature of leadership.

To complicate the matter further, there are a number of problematic differences beyond the specific definitions. Yukl attempts an integrating conceptual framework in order to assist the understanding of prior theorising. Rost on the other hand attempts to demolish the old ideas and replace them with a new model. These can be seen as two perspectives that offer two distinct platforms of understanding (Rickards & Clark, 2006). Nevertheless, there would appear to be some common ground between the platforms, as both would see leadership as an influencing process founded upon a reciprocal relationship.

Other commentators have more recently developed a wider scope of views pertaining to the problem of defining leadership that could be appreciated as a third platform of understanding. Definitions in general provide clues as to what one is trying to address but they are less helpful than is conventionally understood. Language is too ambiguous and meaning too context-dependent for abstract definitions to work effectively, as the definer seldom manages to control meaning particularly well (Alvesson, 1996), leading Grint to ask if leadership is an "essentially contested concept" (Grint, 2005b p17). Subsequently

the author outlines four possibilities for leadership. The first is leadership as a person; is it 'who' leaders are that makes them leaders? Secondly, leadership can be appreciated as results; is it 'what' leaders achieve that makes them leaders? Thirdly, leadership may be seen as a position; is it 'where' leaders operate that makes them leaders? Finally leadership can be seen as a process; is it 'how' things are done that makes leaders?

Deconstructionists would claim that a half-conscious metaphorical structuring of a focal object gives an imaginative, rather than analytically clear-cut meaning to the words (Calás & Smircich, 1991; Morgan, 1997). The exact same definition could therefore be informed by different metaphors and consequently different associated meanings.

Alvesson (1996) illustrates this by drawing on an example from a study related to organisational culture. People may embrace a similar definition of organisational culture as a set of meanings, ideas, values and symbolisms shared by a group. This may also be accompanied by a high diversity of thinking due to a metaphor for culture being one of a compass used for providing direction. Is culture a sacred cow protecting certain basic assumptions or a frozen reality where meanings, ideas and values fix the reality and subordinate members to it? (Alvesson, 1993). Definition is only a limited part of how language and cognition work.

Given the variety of existent phenomena that leadership studies may address and the idiosyncrasies of the researcher and the ambiguities of language, ways of thinking and doing research will not be standardised, even if a particular definition is seen to dominate. This illustrates that leadership as a term and as an object of study in relation to a distinct group of phenomena is difficult to conceptualise in a uniform manner. Two problems occur here and are interrelated: the social worlds of interest to leadership researchers do not lend themselves to neat taxonomical classifications, and language has limitations in fixing goals and purposes through the use of definitions (Alvesson, 1996).

### **2.3.2 An historic view of leadership studies**

A second major criticism of leadership studies is derived from attempts to portray the leadership literature as a particular historical narrative. There are generally two strategies used in employing this device both of which give the impression of progress in findings. The first illustrates the various epochs of leadership research developed over time and the second focuses on the dominant research methodology utilised in leadership research.

In the first instance, it is relatively commonplace for researchers to provide an historic summary of leadership studies, split into apparent dominant schools of research; the following of which are examples: House and Aditya (1997) Bryman (1996) and Yukl (1989). The story as told from this perspective is that 'great man' theory proved unsupportable by the 1930s and a new approach to studying leadership was pioneered by social psychologists. This line of enquiry was halted when it became evident that the

findings were not transferable to large groups or organisations. Trait analysis was quashed by the efforts of Stoghill (1948) who by the 1950s had concluded that the trait studies were inconclusive and contradictory. He and others at the Ohio State University therefore pioneered a behavioural appreciation of leadership, but were unable to isolate key behavioural patterns that made much difference. Situational researchers attempted to discover what behaviours were best in certain situations, but the research foundered on the sheer complexity of the models and the countless variability of situations to be studied. By the 1980s researchers strongly repudiated situational models to conclude that leadership is about personal primacy and doing the right thing to achieve excellence, which forms the core of the New Leadership school (Rost, 1993).

The second is to consider the leadership story from a methodological perspective, dominated as it is by an experimental scientific approach taken from management studies and social psychology. Research in this context has been predominantly conducted within an exemplar scientific experimental methodology; experimenting and refuting theory until a new combination is discovered that holds promise (Rost, 1993). The point of this is that scientific exploration is a time-honoured process of theoretical discovery, illustrated by Edison's tale of repeated failure until the right discovery is made possible. Leadership researchers are continuing this practice, attempting to find the right mix of variables that constitute a general theory of leadership. Illustrated with reference to the heroic stance of the New Leadership school, researchers looked at excellent organisations and CEOs to determine lists of trait behaviours, group facilitation strategies and culture shaping practices for potential leaders. Whilst New Leadership may serve as a watershed in leadership development much of the acknowledged developments in leadership understanding are merely the repackaged theories from the past (Western, 2008).

Accordingly there are two primary criticisms of the kinds of summaries that suggest progress in understanding is being made (Rost, 1993). The first of these relates to the common practice of repeating the summary. As with other things that are frequently repeated, people start to acknowledge the content as facts. Like other myths this summary of the movement of leadership research may be what we want to hear, but is not representative of what really happened (Gemmell & Oakley, 1992). There is no Kuhnian paradigm shift in relation to the development of understanding but rather the theories and models are a mish-mash of what has gone before (Rost, 1993).

The belief that distinct epochs of leadership study have produced commensurate increases in understanding is therefore misleading. There remain a great many theorists currently using traits as an explanation of leadership (Hough, 1992; Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, and new trait models such as the five factor model of leadership are currently being developed (Digman, 1990). Furthermore, the great man/woman theory is alive as much today as yesterday, Bill Gates is our Henry Ford, Bill

Clinton is our Theodore Roosevelt, and Nelson Mandela is our Mohandas Ghandi.

Secondly, in communicating that progress is being made, the narrative serves to produce a feeling of well-being, a sense that all is well in the study and practice of leadership that ultimately serves to foster a self-serving contentment. This message is very comforting for those that believe that leadership is of paramount importance in the survival and growth of our organisations, societies and the world (Rost, 1993 p23). A more critical appraisal however may lead to the suggestion supported by Rost that a realisation of the two conforming narratives has simply brought about theoretical congruence.

The above critique of the historical view of methodology employed is an important factor and can be developed beyond the historical to incorporate the actual research method employed, and it is this that is considered in the next segment of this chapter.

### **2.3.3 Research method**

As in many other fields of management studies, leadership research has been dominated by a tradition of quantitative research drawn from psychology in which quantitative variables are related to various outcomes (Parry & Bryman, 2006; Rost, 1993; Western, 2008). The assumptions of the aforementioned positivistic/neo-positivistic tradition underpin an emphasis on rules and procedures for the securing of objectivity in practice and results (Alvesson, 1996). This methodology argues that well conducted studies should, through the process of verification and falsification, lead to growing support for more and more accurate theories with greater explanatory and predictive capacity (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a). Whilst some researchers are optimistic about current research (House & Aditya, 1997), many are critical of progress made to date (Alvesson, 1996; Mintzberg, 1982; Parry, 1998; Rost, 1993; Western, 2008; Yukl, 1999), to the extent that a number of scholars have called for a profound adjustment of methodology employed (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, 1996; Knights & Willmott, 1992; Parry, 1998; Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

Criticism concerning methodology appears to stem from the practical method employed, which has been dominated by the static correlational analysis of data drawn from survey questionnaires (Yukl, 1999). The majority of these surveys ask subordinates to rate retrospectively how frequently a leader displayed a form of behaviour over a period that may extend for several months or years. Frequency ratings on individual behaviours are a poor method for measuring behaviours embedded in complex social situations, relying as they do on simplistic two factor models (Yukl, 1999).

Researchers are therefore employing methods that are designed to reduce the phenomenon into ever more simplistic models in attempts to 'get it right' (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a). These studies are neither designed nor evaluated by their capacity to challenge an assumption or to provide alternatives, let alone consider multiple ways of conceptualising leadership. The research method underpins the core assumptions

concerning leadership, weakening its conceptual capacity, leaving the primary level of analysis of the leader follower dyad, and underestimating therefore the importance of other external factors that may effect the leadership process (Yukl, 1999). A requirement for the measurement of the leadership relationship under such assumptions is that the leadership dyad remains stable. This results in an essential 'fixing' of the phenomenon, thus narrowing the conceptual alternatives that may be available to the object under scrutiny (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006b).

The possibility of reproducing and reinforcing the 'leader category' interests as well as contributing to the institutionalisation of leadership is a very real possibility (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). The ideas expressed in research about the nature of leadership not only reflect 'object' conditions, they also constitute them. If 'heroic', 'charismatic' or any such label applicable to leadership receives sufficient attention, then it acquires a certain importance in social circumstances. A consequence therefore is that scholars of leadership become predisposed toward asymmetrical power relationships and assign actors to either a leader or a follower classification.

It is argued in this section that the research method employed may have a real tendency to reduce and simplify the phenomenon, which results in a conceptually fixed object of study. Researchers reproduce and reinforce the conventions utilised as a response to expectation and institutionalised forms of power thus providing an ideological alibi but limit, therefore, the possibilities of alternative interpretations and analyses of leadership (Alvesson, 1996).

## **Conclusions**

The previous three segments have highlighted factors that have retarded the knowledge and understanding related to leadership. The first factor relates to a lack of definition, the second concerns the typical use of historical narrative and the final factor pertains to a fixing of research methodology that is typically conventional within organisation studies. The combined effect of these three factors is to promote an orthodoxy that ostensibly supports progression in understanding but has reduced the complexity of the phenomenon thus prejudicing understanding and eliminating the possibility of conceptual alternatives.



## 2.4 An introduction to following

There are few points that leadership scholars agree upon, but one of them may be that, in order to exist as a leader, followers are required. The essence of leadership therefore is followership; there can be no leader without followers (Kellerman, 2008 p 239). As noted above by Grint, leadership may be an essentially contested concept, and so rather unsurprisingly, the theorising of the role and value of followers is contested in equal measure.

At the far end of the spectrum, the role of followers has been underplayed if not ignored. One of the most likely reasons of this is the dominant trend of New Leadership research. This has typically focused on top leadership teams to develop highly focused leader-centric models, which consequently view leadership as a top-down process between leader and subordinate (Yukl, 1989). A number of contributors of the New Leadership concur with this view maintaining that leaders are set apart by their ability to mobilise and bring about elevated performance from followers (Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994a; Yukl, 2002). Later developments such as full range leadership theory continue to assert this, stating that the transformational leader focuses on the material needs of the follower, and is able to build on the followers self-concept and worth, to mould a self-concept that reflects the leader's own self-concept and mission (Bass, 2000). The relationship between leaders and followers is therefore essentially a linear, one-way relationship. The follower is, in effect, a blank slate upon which the leader writes the script (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

Alternatively, at the opposite end of the spectrum sits a variety of contributors who maintain that followers have a vital role to play in the leadership process. Followers have traditionally been presented both individually and collectively as passive objects to be moulded, influenced and coerced by the leader. As an alternative to this traditional approach and influenced by post-structuralist analysis, the currency of followers has become more elevated as the dualist approach is challenged (Western, 2008).

Consequently, some contributors have challenged the notion of followers as docile and have sought to state their individual and collective value. (Chaleff, 2003; Collinson, 2006; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 1992, 2004; Lundin & Lancaster, 1990; Potter et al, 2001; Raelin, 2004; Rosenau, 2004; Seteroff, 2003). Not surprisingly, the value and the role of followers are stated in many ways; the following of which are the three most prevalent. Firstly, followers as moderators of leadership, secondly, followers as substitutes for leadership and finally followers as constructors of leadership (Jackson & Parry, 2008) <sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is acknowledged that psychodynamic theories have interpreted the role of leader and follower. However due to the scope of this study this literature will not be covered here

#### 2.4.1 Followers as moderators of leadership

This perspective of following locates followers in their mainly passive role as receivers of leadership influence but acknowledges, at least, that the leader's influence may have to be differentiated depending on the follower(s) being addressed. Here the view sits comfortably with contingency theorists of leadership (Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971), but is relevant when considering aspects of neo-charismatic models such as Bass's full range leadership theory model. It is recognised that the approach of the leader may have to be moderated in order to appeal to the follower. Those leaders designated as transformational "*diagnose the needs of their followers and then elevate those needs to initiate and promote development.*" (Bass & Avolio, 1994b p552.). This along with the transformational criteria of "Individualised Consideration" requires that there is some modification of approach to the individual follower. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the criteria of "Idealised Influence" or charisma. This is specifically so if charisma is acknowledged as being a socially derived construct (Bryman, 1992.), as charismatic appeal and social contagion may require moderated approaches dependent upon the follower or group of followers. This consideration is given some credence in a study of manager career development; where derailment was attributed to lack of inter-personal skills (Dansereau, 1995).

In theorising on earlier models Bass had seen transformational behaviour as superior to those of transactional behaviours. Within the full range leadership model, however, the value of transactional behaviours has become appreciated as critical to the overall leadership approach. The best leaders employ both transformational and transactional behaviours dependent upon the follower (Rickards & Clark, 2006). Within this, the negotiation of transactional benefits between the leader and follower demands a modified approach to leadership.

The division between transformational and transactional behaviours may be less clear-cut than New Leadership scholars would assert. Rost is very critical of leadership scholars asserting specific differences between leadership and management without clarifying what those differences comprise. Much of leadership theorising is indistinct and weak in definition, and consequently the two terms are conflated. He suggests therefore that much of what has been supposed to be leadership is, in fact, effective general management (Rost, 1993).

---

and the reader is directed, for a more comprehensive approach to Gabriel, Y. 1999.

**Organizations in Depth.** London: Sage., and, Stech, E. L. 2004. Psycho-dynamic approach. In P. G. Northouse (Ed.), **Leadership Theory and Practice**: 235-263. London: Sage..

#### **2.4.2 Followers as substitutes for leadership**

The substitutes for leadership theory as developed by Kerr and Jermier (1978) maintain that a variety of organisational, group, task and individual factors are theorised to be important in providing guidance and good feelings for employees. Leadership behaviour, as classically understood, can be important but should be examined in the context of other factors, some of which can be substituted for or neutralise the leader's influence (Kerr & Jermier, 1978). Included among these variables identified as potential substitutes for leadership are four subordinate characteristics (ability, experience, training, and knowledge; need for independence; professional orientation; and indifference to organisational rewards); three task characteristics (task feedback; routine, methodologically invariant tasks; intrinsically satisfying tasks); and six organizational characteristics (organisational formalisation; organisational inflexibility; group cohesiveness; amount of advisory/staff support; rewards outside the leader's control; and the degree of spatial distance between supervisors and subordinates) (Kerr & Jermier, 1978).

Unlike the transformational approach to leadership, which assumes the leader's transformational behaviour is the key to improving leadership effectiveness, the substitutes for leadership approach assume that the real key to leadership effectiveness is to identify those important situational or contextual variables that may "substitute" for the leader's behaviour, so that the leader can adapt his or her behaviour accordingly. If the leader's influence is substituted, the possibility of leadership occurring must be considered as the leader's activities are deemed largely irrelevant (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

The theory has been developed primarily with the aim of de-emphasising the role of the nominated leader and enhancing the agency of followers (Jackson & Parry, 2008). Empirical studies have failed to substantiate the substitutes construct theory to any satisfactory degree, but recent theorising by the original authors has reinvigorated interest in the concept (Dionne et al, 2005; Jermier & Kerr, 1997), leading to the suggestion that the construct may have the ability to show how followers, through their own activities, effectively moderate or construct leadership. The specific activities of followers in this construct, however, remain untheorised. (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

### 2.4.3 Followers as constructors of leadership

*In whatever direction a ship moves, the flow of waves it cuts will always be noticeable ahead of it... When the ship moves in one direction there is one and the same wave ahead of it, when it turns frequently the wave ahead of it also turns frequently. But wherever it may turn there always will be the wave anticipating its movement. Whatever happens it appears that just that event was foreseen and decreed. Wherever the ship may go, the rush of water which neither directs nor increases its movement foams ahead of it, and at a distance seems not merely to move of itself but to govern the ship's movement also.*

*Tolstoy, (1991) War and Peace. p. 1289*

In this group of theories, the scholars involved have made the activities of followers as constructors of leadership their primary area of focus. Rost (1993) states the importance of

followers within the leadership relationship but maintains that followers do not engage in “followership”. Their actions should instead be appreciated as part of the leadership process acting in tandem with leaders. The view of followers constructing leadership is raised by Grint (1997), who uses Tolstoy’s metaphor of a ship’s bow wave to suggest that leaders are mere figure heads propelled by events and people beyond their control (reproduced above; taken from (Grint, 1997 p.1). The researchers are primarily concerned with the thoughts of followers and how their thoughts construct and represent leaders – leadership is fundamentally in the eye of the follower.

#### Romance

A concern that leadership scholars had become overly preoccupied with leader-centric views of leadership led to the perception that leadership research was perpetuating the hype and unrealistic expectation that is routinely placed upon leaders and, subsequently, became the central focus of Meindl and colleagues. The result of archival studies supported an attributional perspective in which leadership is interpreted in terms of a romanticised conception of leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). This suggests that there is a strong belief, bordering on faith, in the importance of leadership factors to the functioning, effectively or otherwise, of organised systems (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987). In the absence of direct and unambiguous information concerning the organisation followers would ascribe control and responsibility to leaders with events that could be plausibly linked (Meindl et al, 1985). In effect leadership acted as a simplified, biased but attractive way to explain organisational performance, particularly in extreme cases (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

Meindl describes the romance of leadership as a social construction; followers construct an opinion concerning a leader through interacting with other followers facilitating a process referred to as social contagion, not dissimilar to the spread of a socially

constrained virus spread from follower to follower until everyone becomes infected. Social contagion highlights the interpersonal processes and group dynamics that underpin the widespread dissemination of charismatic effects among followers and subordinates (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

### **Social identity theory**

Within social identity theory, leadership is confirmed as primarily a social process in which leaders are able to persuade others to embrace new values, attitudes and goals, and to exert additional effort in the achievement of those goals (Hogg, 2001). The theory proposes that the extent to which an individual is accepted as a leader depends upon how “prototypical” (or representative) the individual is of the group (Hogg, 2001). Other contributors state that prototypicality may not be the sole reason for establishing leadership, considering alternative task-related schemas and stereotypes of leader behaviour (Lord & Brown, 2001; van Kippenberg et al, 2004). Not only is the leader likely to attract a follower who shares a similar background and beliefs, but also the reverse process is possible whereby the leader is selected and supported by followers because the leader is like the group in terms of characteristics, beliefs, aspirations and values (Jackson & Parry, 2008). In the absence of a leader prototypical of the group, group members will use demographic information to generate an impression (stereotype) of the person involved (Hogg et al 2006).

Haslam and Platow (2001) maintain that leadership and identity are mutually interdependent features of social group life. Leadership is dependent on group members sharing a social identity where leaders play a fundamental part in the construction of that identity. While the main focus of this work is on the leader’s identity, there is some complimentary interest in the way that leaders influence followers’ identity as an indirect means of increasing commitment (Chemers, 2003). Reicher et al (2005) claim that traditional leadership models are often seen as a form of zero-sum game, and that leader agency can only be achieved at the expense of follower agency. In line with social identity theory, the writers argue that the agencies of leaders and followers are interdependent to the extent that they rely upon each other to create the condition where mutual influence is possible; the actions of both leaders and followers are therefore dependent upon each other.

Despite acknowledging many contributors to the field Reicher et al (2005) maintain that the extent of social identity theory is deficient in four areas. Firstly, theories need to be reconsidered in order to incorporate Weber’s earlier work on charisma and therefore support the work of transformational theorists. Secondly, the impact of leaders on followers must be addressed in the context of their involvement in a joint relationship. Thirdly, models need to be developed in order to account for how leaders actively shape identities and how followers respond to these attempts. And finally, the authors suggest

that the balance between autonomy and constraint in leadership is a dynamic process that unfolds over time.

Collinson (2006) has gone some of the way to reducing many of the gaps identified by Reicher and colleagues. He maintains that studies of leadership need to develop a broader and deeper understanding of followers' identities and rejects the idea that identities comprise a singular homogenous grouping, as people's lives are inextricably interwoven with the social world around them (Layder, 1994). Collinson's post-structuralist approach suggests that followers' identities may be much more complex and differentiated than previously conceptualised. Individuals are best understood as social selves whose actions have to be understood within their own complex conditions, processes and consequences. While some of these co-existing identities are mutually reinforcing, others may be in tension, mutually contradictory and even incompatible. Organisations not only produce products and services, but, in important symbolic and material ways, they also produce people capable of differing responses to leadership (Collinson, 2006).

## **2.5 Critical approaches to leadership**

The following section reviews the leadership literature written from a critical theoretical perspective. It is based upon the critical theoretical requirement of seeking to challenge leadership conceptualisation of an asymmetrical relationship in order to establish an emancipatory objective. Traditional formulations of leadership as a relationship embedded in a social setting rarely take into account the complexity of the social practice of leadership, sharing a reluctance to take an adequate account of context and, specifically, the interplay of power and subjectivity in the dynamics of the relationship (Knights & Willmott, 1992). Despite an increase in a variety of approaches incorporating Marxist, neo-Marxist, poststructural, feminist and postcolonial approaches, the field of critical organisation studies has evolved around, and remains rooted to, an implicit binary opposition that privileges either organisational control processes or employee resistance to such mechanisms of control (Mumby, 2005). The following studies go some way toward remedying this, considering as they do a complex environment comprising the interplay of various concepts such as identity, power, resistances, politics and ambiguity. The first section deals with identity, power and resistance; the second with the impact of politics; and the final section reviews the effects of ambiguity on relationships within organisations.

### **2.5.1 Identity, power and resistances**

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that identity regulation is now a central feature of organisational control in post-bureaucratic organisations. Collinson (2006) by drawing on Foucauldian analysis points to the way that workplace surveillance systems such as human resources initiatives and technology developments can discipline employees by actively constructing followers' conformist selves, a position which dominates much of the followership literature. Very few studies have looked to examine follower resistance.

Collinson's work shows that organisations confer multiple identities and meanings upon people. Equally, however, they can generate considerable employee insecurity and anxiety (Collinson, 2003). Subsequently leaders are frequently surprised by the reactions of followers (Collinson, 2005), and followers are frequently more adept and cunning at responding to leaders whether it is in supporting, conforming with or resisting them. (Collinson, 2003, 2006; Kellerman, 2008) Collinson's perspective suggests that as a result of routinised surveillance, heightened self-consciousness and the audit culture it produces, followers can become increasingly skilled manipulators of self and information (Collinson, 1999).

Chaleff (2003) is one of the few writers on followers to consider the possibility of followers' more oppositional identity, observing that honest feedback from followers to leaders is frequently absent in organisations. Chaleff (2003) recommends that courageous followers should challenge leaders' views and decisions, a position that

shares some similarities with Collinson's (1994) own examination of "resistance through persistence". Further developments along this line of thinking suggest that workplace resistance is not only a primary means through which employees may express discontent, but is also a way for followers to construct alternative, more positive identities to those provided or prescribed by the organisation. This focus on followers' oppositional, resistant selves suggests that identity construction in organisations may be shaped by differentiation as much as identification (Collinson, 2006).

Iedema and colleagues (2006) extend the concept of worker suppression, framed in terms of disciplinary practices of surveillance and subsequent compliance or resistance responses. They suggest that people are unlikely to simply obey or reject organisationally defined and aligned conduct. Regarding the position of workers as being caught between being determined by surveillance or forced into resistance misses some central facets of contemporary workplace dynamics. These facets, collectively referred to as observance, are to do with workers enacting a social-organisational form of reflection, which enables compliance and resistance to coexist together. This mobilisation is seen to be achieved through any number of organisational initiatives; one of which is the recasting of professionalism, to be appreciated as an 'ideational' control strategy regarded by some as a particularly insidious source of influence capable of manipulating identity (Hodgson, 2005).

Zoller and Fairhurst (2007), with reference to a Foucauldian platform, state that just as leadership cannot be captured as simple categories of behaviour, power should not be viewed simplistically either. From such a perspective, a form of leadership, classed as resistance leadership, emerges incorporating evolving relationships *among resisters* as well as between resisters and their targets, yet always within particular social and historical contexts.

Leadership concepts help us to see mutual influence between individuals and groups, and groups-in-motion. Yet, there is still much to learn because a complete view of resistance leadership views the construct from all sides – those in and out of power as well as those on the rise, issues of justice, ethics and moral accountability at every turn – providing alternative perspectives and thereby influencing understanding. Leadership concepts will not explain all aspects of resistance, and care must be taken by analysts to avoid the romanticisation of resistance leadership to which actors and analysts may fall prey (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007).

### **2.5.2 Political influences**

Within leadership studies there is an acknowledgement that the interaction between leaders and followers cannot occur in a vacuum. Contingency theorists assert that leadership exists in context and have theorised variables that impact upon leadership behaviour (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1984.; House, 1971). Whilst the



effectiveness of the aforementioned theories has been brought into question, it is acknowledged that the contribution to leadership studies has at least provoked better theory (House & Aditya, 1997). In attempting to understand organisations and the interactions between people, Morgan portrays a picture in which the organisation can be seen as a political system, but warns that classification of an organisation as political is potentially problematic (Morgan, 1997). Outwardly, the organisation could be classified as political, but the levels and types of political activity within the organisation are a consequence of the kind of political rule inherent within a system. Morgan provides a

The following are the most common varieties of political rule found in organisations.

**Autocracy:** absolute power held by an individual/small group, supported by control of critical resources, ownership rights, tradition, charisma and other claims to personal privilege.

**Bureaucracy:** rule exercised through the use of written word, providing rational authority "rule of law".

**Technocracy:** rule exercised through the use of knowledge, expert power and ability to solve relevant problems.

**Co-determination:** rule by opposing parties who combine in the joint management of mutual interests, each party draws on a specific power base.

**Representative democracy:** rule through the election of officers mandated to act on behalf of the electorate. Office held as long as support of electorate maintained.

**Direct democracy:** The system where everyone has an equal right to rule and is involved in the decision making. Encourages self-organisation as a key mode of organising.

**Figure 2.3 Organisations and modes of political rule.**

Taken from Morgan G. (1996), p.157

taxonomy of possible modes of political rule reproduced in Figure 2.3, giving rise to the very real possibility that political rule underpinned by bureaucracy can be appreciated as a particular form of normalised social domination (after Weber cited in (Morgan, 1997 p.304).

House and Aditya (1997 p. 455), claim that most observers of organisations would admit that politics and political behaviour occur within organisations and that such behaviour can have

profound affects. Despite this, the extensive study of power and influence, and the processes in organisations, the authors are amazed that there is no political theory of leadership. Several authors have offered definitions of political behaviour, the essence of that the definitions being that political behaviour is driven by self-interest and is not explicitly condoned or condemned by organisational policy or norms. Thus defined, political behaviour is neither inherently good nor evil, and neither detrimental nor functional for organisational performance (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981).

Pfeffer (1981) has described the conditions that give rise to, and enhance, the exercise of political behaviour. Mintzberg has further described many of the countervailing political forces that exist in organisations, leading him to theorise that political activity occurs when people think differently and want to behave differently. In order to resolve the tensions between individuals, recourse to political behaviour, often defined as games, is regularly manifested in those organisations defined as a political arena (Mintzberg, 1985). The ability to thrive in such an arena is referred to by Ferris and colleagues as a critical

skill in organisational survival (Ferris et al, 2007).

Ammeter et al (2002), in moving toward the development of a political theory of leadership, acknowledge the aforementioned games, but assert that such behaviour does not always need to be seen as damaging. Political activity performed by leaders can be seen as a neutral, and inherently necessary, component of organisational functioning (Pfeffer, 1981), giving rise to the reduction or elimination of organisational ambiguity (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Ferris & Judge, 1991). Political activity should be perceived as valuable to the constructive process of developing shared meaning (Ammeter et al, 2002), in turn seen as critical to the establishment of leadership (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). This is problematic, as leaders must adopt political behaviours that align with the established political norms, because their behaviours must match the situational assessments of their followers.

Interestingly the use of external expertise has been identified as a potentially negative political tactic (Fairholm, 1993). This position was endorsed in a study of sanctioned and non-sanctioned political behaviours by Zanzi and O'Neill (2001), where the use of experts can be ambiguously perceived as both sanctioned and non-sanctioned behaviour depending on the manner and circumstances. Further potentially ambiguous behaviours are reactive behaviours that may be classified as impression management, and those behaviours identified by Ashforth and Lee (1990), utilised in order to avoid action, most often for typically self serving purposes. There exists a wide array of situations where the use of non-sanctioned tactics and potentially unethical behaviour may prove advantageous to the leader, to followers or the organisation as a whole (Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001). An example of this may be the use by the senior leadership of an organisation exploiting the ambiguity of a situation to increase their own power or to protect power sources, a process referred to as "institutionalisation" (Yukl, 2002 p351).

### **2.5.3 Ambiguity**

Of concern to critical scholars is a lack of appreciation of organisational ambiguity in leadership theorising. Much of the problem here is perceived to emanate from the research paradigm under which most leadership studies are conducted. The positivistic approaches of management science render it incapable of studying the complex and ambiguous dimensions of leadership processes and practice (Alvesson, 1996; Knights & Willmott, 1992; Morgan, 1997). In order to achieve something that appears to be objective, variations are reduced, standardisation is sought and overt simplification prevails. The arbitrariness, emotionality and uncertainty of social life is suppressed to fit procedures that give the impression of objectivity. The standardisation of social phenomena risks a basic distortion of social reality, not in the sense of reporting "reality" incorrectly, but in terms of representing certainty and order at the expense of openness and ambiguity (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

In considering the effects of ambiguity on organisations, a number of contributors agree that whilst ambiguity is important in organisational life it need not always have a detrimental effect. Eisenberg (2007) sees management communication as the strategic use of symbols, in which the communicator's goals are neither unitary nor consistent. A shift is therefore advocated from an overly ideological adherence to clarity to a more contingent, strategic orientation. This perspective sees organisational communication as the process through which organisation occurs and not something that occurs within organisations.

In striking a balance between being understood, not offending and maintaining self-image individuals utilise different strategies, one of which may be to utilise ones resources of ambiguity, which in this context is seen as a process that promotes "unified diversity" Eisenberg (2007 p.7). *Strategic ambiguity* fosters the existence of multiple viewpoints thereby allowing varied interpretation to exist amongst a population who contend that they are attending to the same message.

In terms of leadership, the author suggests that in making organisational activity meaningful to members the language utilised should be abstract, evangelical and even poetic. It therefore becomes a political necessity to engage in strategic ambiguity so that different constituent groups may apply different interpretations to the message/symbol. Leaders use ambiguity strategically therefore to guard against the acceptance of a standard way of viewing organisational reality (Eisenberg, 2007).

Further developing the concept of strategic ambiguity, Giroux (2006) assembles a number of themes related by a central concern for collective action and the role of ambiguity. The author characterises *pragmatic ambiguity* as the course of admitting more than one course of action, in which a practical solution to the difficulties of divergent interpretation may be resolved, thereby negating organisational paralysis.

It is argued that the term pragmatic ambiguity more accurately reflects the crux of the matter, in that equivocal accounts allow for differing courses of action whilst also maintaining a semblance of unity. This process may be seen as both the result and resource of a management approach. The very activities of organising requires alliances to be made, within which differences are negotiated and compromised, as such the phrase pragmatic ambiguity should be appreciated as a practice – strategic or otherwise – borne out of and sustained by discursive activities (Giroux, 2006).

In a study by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003a), the authors specifically consider the impact of ambiguity upon the understanding and practice of leadership within a knowledge intensive organisational context. The authors maintain that organisational context renders the organisation under study as particularly susceptible to modern conceptualisations of leadership comprising as it does uncertain, long-term and complex

work processes underpinned by an apparent lack of need for close supervision. The conclusions of the study are therefore considered surprising and provocative.

The study makes four related conclusions. Firstly, managers' ideas around leadership seem to be vague, disconnected and not easily applicable to work. Managers are caught between leadership discourses, practical constraints, and administrative demands. Secondly, contemporary ideas about leadership have little impact on organisational practice. Thirdly, managers in making sense of their work situation do so from different moral positions. Self-location in the 'good' position of leadership does not restrict people from practicing a 'bad' form of micro-management, and lastly, managers, despite the apparent contradictions, separate the position of good leadership from bad management to the extent that they sustain a leadership ideal seemingly at odds with much of managerial work. This serves to undermine the essence of leadership itself thereby reducing its importance. This constitutes the 'ugly' aspect of leadership - a position underpinned by the ambiguity inherent in leadership construction and the working context (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a).

Notwithstanding, some broad assumptions made concerning the ambiguous nature of organisation and the organisation under study in particular, it remains to be seen how ambiguity affects the dynamics of the leader follower relationship and whether this behaviour deviates from that outlined in more traditional leadership studies. With particular reference to the studies of Eisenberg (2007) and Giroux (2006), the relevance of ambiguity being utilised strategically or otherwise in support of agency in this context remains to be explored and illustrated.

#### 2.5.4 Critical theory and leadership

Critical organisation studies have yet to embrace research that addresses leadership as a significant concept. One reason for this reluctance may be the conflation of leadership with the study of leadership, which is largely quantitative and managerially focused. As a result, leadership may be equated with the managerial role itself, so that only those in organisationally sanctioned roles count as leaders. A second factor may be a tendency to view leadership as a form of domination, an aggregation of leadership with other 'mechanisms of domination' like culture and structure (Hardy & Clegg, 2006). This view may lead critical scholars to devalue leadership, given preferences for understanding deep structures of power over relational approaches (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007).

A foundation of this study is to utilise a broad understanding of the literature as a vital resource when reflecting upon the empirical materials in order to make interpretations. Furthermore, the scope of the study is to widen the voices included in the interpretations and not therefore, to limit them (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). Generally critical theoretical approaches to leadership studies have thrown doubt upon the normative understanding of leadership and its value in organisational life (Bresnen, 1995; Grint, 2005a). It is evident therefore that some studies will provide a more salient anchor point for interpretation than others, given the political-ideological continuum that is particularly relevant to critical theoretical examination. It is to these studies that attention is now turned.

Positioned slightly outside the approaches outlined later is situated a study by Calás & Smircich (1991) who use feminist deconstructionist methodologies to juxtapose 'leadership' and 'seduction' functions to expose the rhetorical and cultural conditions that support organisational leadership. This perspective is centred on the seductive effects of academic organisational writings from which the authors conclude that as a form of seduction, there is nothing profound about leadership. This poststructuralist analysis is claimed to be of particular value when innovations in theory and research are expected, but not forthcoming. Researchers and theorists of leadership may be *saying/doing* about leadership very different things from what actual managers are *saying/doing* about it, but one and the other constantly reproduce strong manifestations of the homosocial order by repeating seduction as truth. Calás & Smircich (1991) conclude by asserting that this process of legitimising fixes structural relations of power within broader social systems. Whilst this paper provides evidence of an alternative conceptualisation of leadership, this study deals lightly with the implications of its findings and considers mainly the structural relations of power between leaders and followers and the extent to which they are fixed in practice.

A seminal paper in leadership studies by Smircich & Morgan (1982) states that successful acts of organisation are often seen to rest in the synchrony between the

initiation of action and the appeal for direction; between the actions of leaders and the receptivity and responsiveness of followers. They focus therefore on the way meaning in organisational settings is created, sustained and changed as this provides a way of understanding the fundamental nature of leadership as a social process. The key challenge for the leader is to manage meaning in a way that orientates other individuals to the achievement of desirable ends.

The authors conclude that their analysis draws attention to the role of power as a defining feature of the leadership process, characterised by the way that the leader's sense-making activities assume a priority over the sense-making activities of others. Situations of formal leadership institutionalise this pattern into a system of rights and obligations where the leader has the prerogative to define reality and the led accept the definition as a frame of reference through which to orient their own activity. Leadership is therefore a power based reality construction process, an unintended consequence of which may be a condition referred to as 'trained inaction'. Building upon this analysis, this study will further consider aspects of power within the leader follower relationship and consider the extent of the perceived asymmetrical nature of the power relationship held between the two.

Developing further the restrictive capacity of leadership, Gemmill & Oakley (1992), utilise a Jungian approach to speculate that leadership as a social myth represents a regressive wish to return to a protected environment absolved of consciousness, mindfulness and responsibility. This expression of infantilisation is borne out of an actual unitive experience of a symbiotic environment and comprises therefore the ultimate form of deskilling and learned helplessness.

Members of social systems often behave as alienated robots, paralysed by an environment in which nothing appears fixed. Work processes are imbued with meaning by each individual and therefore have no objective meaning of its own. Subsequently individuals are locked into a dependency upon a leader myth that helps to rationalise and make safe individual fears. Leaders and followers therefore act in well-defined and limited roles that reflect and consequently reinforce existing norms and values (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992). Specifically this study exposes the capacities of followers to interpret meaning inherent in the workplace. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider fully the findings of Gemmill & Oakley's paper, given the variations in approach employed. However aspects of the study that include compliance with norms and values and the utilisation of power structures will be further considered.

In analysing the socially constructed nature of leadership in practice, Knights & Willmott (1992) consider further the effect of power on the leadership relationship. A critical reflection of leadership qualities demonstrates that power is relational and involves an interdependence between more and less advantaged groups. Instead of assuming an

underlying consensus between leaders and followers reinforced by effective leadership to generate a 'committed polity', it is more plausible to understand the achievement of consent from followers as precarious and often achieved through the exercise of power.

The authors point to the limitation in conceptualising power as a possession, in that it distracts attention from the interdependence of social relations and the socially constructed nature of reality. The phenomenological dimension of power is important since the meanings which secure and sustain power relations have to be negotiated and can never be assumed to meet with acceptance merely because they are issued from leaders. Furthermore, negotiations have to be continually repeated, as in practice power does not exist independent of its exercise. The importance of this insight is that it positions leadership as a dynamic social practice. In considering leadership as a practice between leaders and followers, this study will further consider the conceptualisation of interdependence to include the possibilities (in practice) of an interdependence of power relations between constituent groups by reflecting upon the structure of agency and related behaviours.

Bresnen, (1995) challenges the mainstream understanding of leadership theory by exploring in depth the nature of leadership as a socially attributed and constructed phenomenon. A consequence of assuming that 'managers' act as 'leaders', creates definitional problems, which in turn lead to leadership processes being amalgamated within the wider power and authority structures inherent in leader follower relations. Furthermore, approaches that emphasise the socially constructed nature of leadership often tend toward a deterministic view of the impact of common conceptions of leadership and underplay the role of agency in negotiating, reinforcing and otherwise influencing leadership as a social construction.

From the accounts of practicing managers, the author highlights basic similarities but also many more differences in the way the concept is interpreted and articulated by practitioners. The interpretive approach is posited therefore to provide a bridge between the apparent gap in understanding between mainstream theory and research and other alternative, critical platforms by providing a more 'grounded' perspective in understanding. It is intended that this study will utilise an interpretive approach, albeit through a critical theoretical lens, to examine the construction of leadership as a social influence process and outline areas that may bridge from the traditional, to more critical approaches to leadership conceptualisation.

Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003b) choose to centre their analysis on organisational context typified in their study by high levels of ambiguity, complexity and worker educational attainment. Whilst it may be probable that leadership in normalised terms could be observed, the general conclusions of the study indicate that it is difficult to say anything concerning the existence of leadership in the vast majority of organisational

situations. The study details two breakdowns in leadership construction, but does not dismiss the possibility of others occurring in different contextual situations.

The observed breakdowns lead the authors to propose three specific findings of the study. The first concerns the value of leadership given the vague and contradictory notions about leadership as stated by practitioners. The second concerns the fragility of leadership as a position relative to practice, and finally the study draws attention to methodological problems that points toward the requirement for a more open and questioning approach. This leads to the assertion that leadership requires critical study and should not therefore be taken for granted.

In drawing conclusions from the interpretations from the empirical materials this study will utilise a critical theoretical approach to examine additional breakdowns in leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b) and particularly those related to dominant management ideologies. Unpacking of these structures exposes to scrutiny constructs such as power (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Knights & Willmott, 1992; Smircich & Morgan, 1982), complexity/ambiguity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a; Eisenberg, 2007; Giroux, 2006) and organisational context (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b). This study builds upon these outlined studies to demonstrate how the dynamics of the relationship between leader and follower are influenced by the aforementioned constructs and are bridged by political considerations; an additional construct that is implicit in much critical management research but rarely dealt with satisfactorily in leadership studies (House & Aditya, 1997).



## 2.6 Conclusions

This final section of this chapter will briefly summarise the main arguments presented in each of the sections above. Using these arguments a framework will be presented that relates to the research question and establishes a framework for the study.

The first section introduced critical theory and a critical approach to organisation studies establishing the emancipatory credentials of the approach against the orthodox privileging of the management/leader perspective. Following this, the principal theories of the New Leadership school were presented; it was argued that this school has come to represent the normative conceptualisation of leadership. Criticisms of this school were made from three distinct angles. The summation of these criticisms is that the progress of leadership understanding has been retarded by the assumption of progress underpinned by lack of conceptualisation concerning the nature of leadership, the reliance on the use of historical narrative and a conservative research methodology.

The second section of this chapter outlined theories that challenge the leader-centric position of leadership studies by focusing on the presentation of theories from a follower perspective. These theories were broken into three distinct sections pertaining to the role of the follower as moderator, substitute and constructor of the leader follower relationship.

The third section of this chapter presented literature supporting a critical theoretical perspective of leadership. Arguments are presented that challenge the asymmetrical, conceptual orthodoxy of normative leadership. It moves the leader follower relationship beyond the purely dyadic and establishes the necessity of appreciating leadership from a holistic perspective. It introduces the factors of power, identity, resistance, politics and ambiguity. These factors have been largely ignored by a leadership conceptualisation underpinned by neo-positivistic assumptions. The final part of this section outlined the small number of studies concerning leadership conducted from a critical theoretical perspective.

The application of a critical theoretical approach to leadership demands that we look beyond the management and leadership literature that draws too heavily on the insider view of leadership. This insider view comprises a normative understanding of leadership and is built on rationalistic and functionalist ideas from management theory (Alvesson, 1996; Western, 2008). The New Leadership approach noted by Bryman (1996) produced an initial jolt to the impetus of leadership studies. However, it remains dominated by a predominantly functionalist perspective and research methodology that, as a result, privileges management knowledge presented as science, obscuring the political and power aspects of organisations.

This study will utilise a critical theoretical methodology in order to develop a framework of the dynamics of the leader follower relationship. The organisation of this study has been

informed by the literature presented in the preceding sections of this chapter and has established a number of criteria for the conduct of the study.

A critical theoretical methodology establishes different parameters for the study of leadership as opposed to the neo-positivistic assumptions of the traditional research methodology. In conducting this study through a critical theoretical lens, it responds to the call for a radical reorientation in leadership studies (Alvesson, 1996; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Grint, 2005b; Rost, 1993; Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Watkins, 1989).

This study makes no judgement upon the objective truth claims of any of the literature outlined above. It acknowledges the literature and seeks to utilise it in making interpretations concerning the dynamics of the leader follower relationship as detailed in the materials collected during fieldwork.

This study defines leadership as an influence relationship between leaders and followers. It recognises that the relationship is more complex than is presented within the normative literature. It establishes the principle of observing the relationship between leaders and followers from a holistic perspective and acknowledges that the wider contextual factors such as power, politics and ambiguity are important when making interpretational analysis concerning the dynamics of the relationship.

In deliberately viewing the leader follower relationship through a critical theoretical lens the study seeks to challenge traditional conceptual notions of leadership and leader follower relations by drawing attention to the stereotype of power relations theorised to exist between the two groups. In establishing this challenge, the study confirms its emancipatory intent.

## Chapter 3 - Public sector context

### Introduction

*"Leadership is a key factor in any large organisation. This is especially true in the public sector where leaders are being asked to deliver more modern, efficient and dynamic services at a time of great social and technological change. I value the tremendous job being done by leaders in our hospitals and schools, local authorities and elsewhere. But I want to see more being done to develop and support effective leadership across the public sector as a whole."*

**Prime Minister, Tony Blair. (Cabinet Office, 2001a)**

This chapter builds on the previous chapter by further establishing the theoretical framework for this study. It has been argued that the noted lack of progress concerning the understanding of the leadership phenomenon can be attributed to normative conceptualising and the functionalist methodologies employed in those theoretical and empirical studies (Alvesson, 1996; Collinson, 2006; Rost, 1993; Watkins, 1989; Western, 2008). In counteracting these perceived deficiencies, this study moves beyond a normative appreciation of leadership and sets the leader follower relationship in its organisational context. Interpretations based upon a holistic appreciation of the phenomenon offset the reductionist tendencies of dominant methodologies and allows a wider and deeper appreciation of the leadership phenomenon. (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001; Bryman, 1996)

In developing a broader understanding of the environment, it is necessary that wider contextual factors be considered. A critical theoretical perspective places value on political issues related to power, control and ambiguity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001). No less important however are the historical antecedents that supply a deeper situational understanding of the dynamic organisational context within which the leader follower relationships are played.

This chapter therefore is broken down into three separate component sections; the first part sets out the history of legislative reform targeted at the public sector and local government in particular. The second section of this chapter comprises four separate segments that relate to each other as they outline how reform has affected public sector working life. These segments are as follows,

#### 3.2.1 Between markets and hierarchies

This segment outlines the Blairite philosophy of following a "third way". Despite assertion to the contrary this move is shown to be less radical than has been presented and forms the bedrock for encroachment on the public sector by private sector related 'managerialism'.

### 3.2.2 New public management

This segment outlines a paradigm shift in public sector management. Based upon the belief that traditional models are outmoded the new public management is informed by practices transforming private sector organisations.

### 3.2.3 Public sector ethos and tradition.

This segment describes public administration from an individual perspective. The segment suggests that new public management is displacing the traditions of public administration and consequently the public sector is losing an asset of value.

### 3.2.4 Ambiguity in the public sector

This segment maintains that public sector businesses are inherently ambiguous institutions. The traditions of public administration help workers deal with high levels of complexity and ambiguity.

This chapter concludes by stating that the public sector contains many interpretive spaces and that the government's attempts to close these interpretive spaces have led them to assert the value of a managerially functionalist and normative style of leadership.

### 3.1 Public sector reform

#### Introduction

This section sets out the history of public sector reform undertaken since the conservative administration under Margaret Thatcher gained control of UK parliament in the late 1970s. Here it is established that reform was imposed upon a public sector by a managerialist executive government whose primary assumption was that the public sector was (and remains) inefficient in comparison to private sector enterprise.

*"Drip, drip, drip. Day after day an insidious poison is fed into the nation's veins, spreading anger and cynicism about everything in the public sector. Nothing works, billions are wasted, public servants of every kind are pointless jobsworths feathering their nests and twiddling their thumbs."*

**Toynbee (2009 p.29)**

This historical narrative related to the historical reform of UK public services is integral to the appreciation of the organisational context of UK Local Authorities and provides an essential backdrop to the understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and followers.

#### Background

The structure of local government within the UK is established by the Local Government Act of 1972 introduced as the Local Government Bill into Parliament and debated in 51 sittings from 25 November 1971 to 20 March 1972. The Act abolished the previous existing local government structure, and created a two-tier system of counties and districts. (In some instances civil parish councils were maintained in England, giving rise to a three-tier system.) The majority of provisions established by the Act came into force at midnight on 1 April 1974. In England, there were 46 counties and 296 districts.

Political opinion had always favoured, in principle, the establishment of unitary authorities, and the 1972 Act was considered a political fudge. The Labour Party's statement of policy in 1982 states,

*"There is an irrational split of functions between the two tiers compounded by a confusing overlap of responsibilities ... We favour the creation in England and Wales of unitary authorities"*

**(Labour's Programme, 1982p.220)**

In 1991, Michael Heseltine announced that the then Conservative government would review local structures and in particular would consider the implementation of unitary authorities defined as,

*"...any authority which is the sole principal council for its local government area"*

**(Local Government Changes for England Regulations, 1994,section 3)**

A general review of local government including the formation of unitary authorities was safely debated through the House as the 1992 Local Government Act. The finalisation of the principles of the Act came because of the Cooksey Commission in September 1995, which finally established the structures of local government in the UK in 1996.

### **A historical account of reform**

It has been argued that public sector reform in the UK began in 1976 when the international monetary fund imposed stringent conditions on government spending in exchange for stabilising sterling against foreign currencies. Hence, the practice of imposing spending limits was well established before the Conservative defeat of Labour in the 1979 General Elections. (Barzelay, 2001)

According to Barzelay's (2001) reading of Colin Campbell and Graham Wilson's case study of public sector reform in the UK entitled "The End of Whitehall: Death of a Paradigm", (Campbell & Wilson, 1995), Thatcher's use of spending limits to restrain public sector wages and involvement in negotiations should be viewed significantly. Ultimately these negotiations produced wage settlements that curtailed cash spending limits than had previously been thought possible. The government's stance in this appears to have been of considerable significance in controlling the growth of public expenditure. According to the authors it was Thatcher's personal interventions, which were more in line with managerialism, that were most significant. Her strategy involved the statement of objectives and aligning activities toward achievement as opposed to the consensus coordination of the past. Thatcher also held her cabinet colleagues responsible for making a mark on their own departments.

*"Mrs Thatcher is an extraordinary mixture of recklessness and caution. When she is in her reckless mood, she is in effect a permanent revolutionary, deeply dissatisfied with the Government's record, and convinced that, but for her unceasing vigilance, the whole country would instantly slide into sloth and chaos. In this mood, she is almost Maoist in her suspicion of established institutions, seeing them as mere encrustations of temporizing and vested interest, and above all as obstacles to change, change, change. At such moments. Permanent Secretaries, Governors of the B.B.C. - and her ministerial colleagues – are perhaps fortunate that the British system denies her the power to send them off to work in the fields."*

### **Anderson (1986)**

According to Fry (1988) the initiation of public sector reform had significantly been underway since the introduction of "accountable management" in the late 1960s. Introduction of a computerised system involving a network of 120 cost centres, each controlled by a manager with budgetary responsibility for running costs made financial management a fact. Departments became better equipped to review their activities, set

objectives and establish priorities.

However, it was the Financial Management Initiative (FMI), launched in 1982 in the White Paper, *Efficiency and Effectiveness*, (Cabinet Office, 1982) that raised questions concerning Ministerial accountability, which according to Fry "is the economic liberal gospel as applied to the Civil Service." (Fry, 1988p 5). Practically the initiative involved relatively junior Civil Servants accepting responsibility for their own budgets. According to the White Paper, the initiative was designed:

*"To promote in each department and organisation a system in which managers at all levels have:*

- (a) A clear view of the objectives, and means to assess and, wherever possible, measure outputs or performance in relation to those objectives;*
- (b) Well defined responsibility for making the best use of their resources, including a critical scrutiny of output and value for money; and*
- (c) The information (particularly about costs), the training and the access to expert advice that they need to exercise their responsibilities effectively."*

**(Cabinet Office, 1982, paragraph 13)**

Further reforms included the National Audit Act of 1983, (National Audit Act, 1983), which established the Comptroller, Auditor General and the staff of the National Audit Office as officers of the House of Commons, giving them powers to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of government departments. As a consequence, one of the Thatcher government's first acts was to appoint Sir Derek (later Lord) Rayner from Marks and Spencer to The Efficiency Unit established by the Treasury, to advise it on the promotion of efficiency and the elimination of waste in government departments. Following Rayner, Sir Ralph Ibbs as advisor to the Prime Minister, in what became known as the Ibbs report, published *Improving Management in Government: the Next Steps* (Efficiency Unit, 1988), stressing the acceleration of finding better value for money.

Alongside public sector reform the Thatcher government embarked upon a programme of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) initiated by the (Local Government Planning and Land Act, 1980) and culminating in the Local Government Act (Local Government Act, 1988). This was a further attempt to bring greater efficiency to local government and health services utilising competition and internal markets. Existing public services were tendered alongside private sector alternatives and service contracts subsequently organised. Public organisations became influenced by monetarist economic policies that signified the widespread introduction of "free market" influences on public services.

### **New Labour carries on...**

Following the election of the “New Labour” government under Tony Blair, the government continued the reforming policy of the public sector set out under the March 1999 white paper “Modernising Government” (Cabinet Office, 1999) in which further reforms were established. According to Ian McCartney the Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office and taken from the 2000 government report on progress made following publication of the modernising government white paper,

*“Good government need not be big government. Rather, it is about working together in ways that haven’t happened before. Central government working in partnership with town halls, unions and the private and voluntary sectors to deliver the best possible services.... It is not about dogma, it’s about what works. This applies to joined-up government too.”*

**Ian McCartney, Cabinet Office (2000ap2-3)**

Central to Prime Minister Blair’s government agenda of modernising government is the idea of pursuing a ‘third way’ between the markets of the free economy and the hierarchical traditions of public administration (Kirkpatrick, 1999).

This section has outlined the history of UK public sector reform since the mid 1970s. Reform has sought to remove the perceived inefficiencies inherent within the public sector, but it has been shown that reform has also challenged the nature of work for many public sector employees and, indeed, under New Labour’s ‘modernising government’ agenda, reforms have challenged the notion of the public sector itself. The following sections of this chapter will deal with the impact of public sector reform on those that work within it in order to provide a deeper contextual understanding of the environment within which relationships between leaders and followers are conducted.



### **3.2 The impact of reform on the public sector**

This section supplies a wider contextual appreciation of the context of public sector leadership by arguing that reform is fundamentally challenging the practices of work within the public sector, and local government specifically. In this section, the influences of the 'third way' and the encroachment of new public management on public sector traditions and ethos are outlined. Firstly the 'third way' is portrayed as an approach between markets and hierarchies that is influenced primarily through a perceived 'best practice' within the private sector (Kirkpatrick, 1999). The influences of the private sector are further explored in the second section to show that the methods of public administration are being challenged by the encroachment of managerialism (Barzelay, 2001). The third section applies external forces of reform to the internal tradition and ethos of public sector work and workers (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). This chapter concludes with the assertion that the interplay of forces instigated by reform is likely to have inflated the impact of organisational ambiguity; a factor underplayed by researchers of organisations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

#### **3.2.1 Between hierarchies and markets**

A progressive modern public administration built on the Prussian model still dominated in the UK and other western countries after the end of the Second World War. Organisation of this type was typified by an executive; input-oriented budget; a professional civil service and merit-based public personnel administration; control by rules; standardisation of procedures; task specialisation and a strict administrative hierarchy with clearly delineated staff and line functions. A perceived weakening of the dominance of large scale bureaucracy and the subsequent failure of public sector organisations as demonstrated by the failure of a number of privatised business in the UK contributed to the call for the reforms outlined in the previous section (Thompson & Miller, 2003 p396).

Thatcherite reforms such as the mechanisms of compulsory competitive tendering and the widespread privatisation of utility and other publicly owned organisations are explicit examples of a move toward a more market driven public sector. It is considered that underpinning this deliberate move is a widespread appreciation of the private sector to which the public sector apparently compares unfavourably (Pollitt, 1993). It is argued that the reforms of executive government have undermined the traditions of public administration both ideologically and practically, leading to a widespread belief that public servants were less estimable than successful businessmen (Greenaway, 1995).

Additionally it is reasonable to conclude that much of the aim of the reforms of the Thatcher administration was an open attack upon a perceived to be over large bureaucracy, characterised in its pejorative sense, to emphasise the inefficient and obstructive nature of public organisations and public servants specifically. Reforms that were explicitly concerned with restructuring accountability, increasing competition,

emphasising consumerism and reducing the opportunities for state intervention were also concerned with altering the values and attitudes of those involved in delivering public services (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996).

Central to this analysis is the sustained hostility displayed by ministers over the years to public servants, the climax of which was the refusal of the Conservative government to rescue the Royal Institute of Public Administration (RIPA) from bankruptcy in the mid 1980s. An extension of this view is that right wing government instilled the belief that public sector business can be improved by applying the methods of private business in order to increase the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public services. A significant method for achieving this was through the employment of business people as efficiency advisors or heads of public service agencies (Elcock, 2005).

Although the Blairite philosophy of following a 'third way' is presented as a radical alternative to markets and hierarchy through government rhetoric such as the "Modernising Government" White Paper (Cabinet Office, 1999), others see the adoption of the third way as reinforcing the conceptual superiority of the private sector (Pollitt, 1993). The 'third way' principle is based upon a belief drawn from the private sector which suggests that inter firm networks based upon mutually supportive relationships are a source of advantage for public organisations (Kirkpatrick, 1999).

The tradition of public administration is reported as being under threat from managerialist practices established under the Thatcher government and continued through the Labour administration. The principal differences between the two approaches are that managerialism is concerned with the economics, as opposed to the politics, of service provision favoured by administrative tradition; an emphasis on government failure as opposed to market failure; and is sceptical about the capacity of bureaucracy to provide services efficiently and effectively. The models that have displaced the paradigm of constitutional bureaucratic hierarchy have discredited public administration, both theoretically and practically. Government policies based on competition and performance are ripe to be judged by a paradigm based upon management. In sum the ideology of public administration has been challenged by the scientism of public management (Boyne, 1996) and it is to this we turn in the next section.

### **3.2.2 The new public management**

A pattern of public sector reform has been noted by a number of prominent authors. Barzelay (2001) has outlined a number of key case studies of public sector reform across North America and Western Europe. In each study, the traditional method of public administration has been challenged by the attempted reforms of executive government and a number of similarities have been noted. It has been proposed that traditional 'outmoded' forms of organising public administration have become displaced by a paradigm shift in public sector management, referred to in the literature as new public

management (NPM) (Common, 1998; Hood, 1995; Rhodes, 1991).

Common to NPM is the call for the continued adoption of the organisational designs and practices that are perceived to be transforming private business; driven by a technocratic imperative, communication and technological advances, and a narrow view of the state and the public sector generally (Elcock, 2005). The primary features of the NPM movement are decentralised, flatter, perhaps smaller organisations, structured around sets of generic value-creating processes and specific competencies, modern information technology, balanced responsibility budgeting and control systems, loose alliances of networks and high-performance human resource practices (Elcock, 2005; James, 2004; Thompson & Miller, 2003). Specifically human resource management practices are based on the assumption that the clarification of goals and performance objectives improves performance. At the core of this lies the belief that performance can be enhanced by articulating goals and accentuating management accountability for the achievement, based on indicators to assess the achievement of the goals and using budget as an incentive (Boyne & Chen, 2007; Lee, Rainey, & Chun, 2009; Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003).

In essence NPM is grounded in two fundamental philosophies: “managerialism” and “economic rationalism” (Parker & Guthrie, 1993). Management technologies involved in promoting these philosophies have involved structural redesign; performance agreements; contracting out of selected services and functions; and commercialisation. This involves the restructuring of government departments and functions to introduce accountability and economic efficiency; corporatisation, the effective transfer of the trading activities of government departments or enterprises to government owned corporations. Although the ultimate ownership of these activities does not change, the form of the ownership structure does as government withdraws from the ownership of the production of goods and services of major areas of public sector activity (James, 2004).

Debate concerning NPM is less clear-cut than the widespread acceptance of its platform would suggest (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). The debates are polarised by political sciences on the one hand and organisation studies and management sciences on the other. It is considered that the separation of the debates has contributed to an intellectual crisis of British public administration (Boyne, 1996).

This crisis can be appreciated as part of the paradigm shift from public administration toward new public management. It is the contention of a number of contributors that the mirroring of private sector practices serves as a leitmotif for reform (du Gay, 2006).

In the process of making ‘managerialism’ operational it displaces what is already in place, without consideration as to the value of a neutral civil service as an instrument of government (du Gay, 2006). The reforms implemented by the UK government have had the effect of shifting national policy units into different roles, of becoming courtiers and

implementers of policies rather than the formulators of national policy, and of taking on services that were once the purview of local government (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). Subsequently the traditional remit of local government are being challenged and placed under greater levels of scrutiny from external agencies (Power, 1999) and internally constituted committees and elected politicians (Cole, 2001), contrary to the possibility that such a policy of management by measurement may be entirely inappropriate for the public sector (Lee et al, 2009); (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003).

### **3.2.3 Public sector ethos and tradition**

As illustrated above, reform and change is an endemic feature of UK public administration. Whilst no area of the public sector has escaped the structural, organisational, political and managerial reforms of the past thirty years, local government has been at the forefront of much of it (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). Underpinning contemporary analyses of change, however, is an almost implicit assumption that the bureaucracies of local government, and the people who staff it, have remained passive participants in the relentless process of change. Little attention has been paid to the effects of recent changes on the perceptions and values of local government employees (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). Perceptions rendered more complex, as they are often both the object of reform and the means through which it occurs. In a study by Pratchett and Wingfield (1996) the core values of local government are defined collectively as the public sector ethos (PSE), a characteristic feature of local government officers.

A generic PSE is identified as a common denominator between organisational and professional groups that populate the public sector and local government and comprises five constructs as defined by Pratchett and Wingfield (1996),

Accountability – underpinning the legitimacy of political structures and democratic government. It involves not only hierarchical mechanisms of accountability but also a commitment to implement political legitimate policy without reference to the wisdom of the policy.

Bureaucratic behaviour – exemplified by the characteristics of honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity.

Public interest – defining interest is not confined to the employing organisation but also incorporates the wider interests of the community and the notion that the organisation serves the 'Public Good'

Motivation – personal and organisational profit is not the primary motivation of individual or collective efforts. Motivation is primarily altruistic as opposed to financial.

Loyalty – operation within a complex set of personal and organisational loyalties, comprising the organisation, function, the institution of government, community and

personal loyalties that are derived from the interaction within both organisational and social contexts.

Reform and economic pressure on resources has impacted upon the established public sector ethos (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). Furthermore the incursion of NPM has supplied a foothold for alternative cultures which contrast with those that are encompassed within PSE. Authorities have been driven to separate functional departments between policy makers, purchasers and providers; in-house units are encouraged to act like businesses and, as stated previously, adopt the practices and behaviours seen in the private sector. These forces can be appreciated to be at odds with the public sector ethos and have therefore sparked a clash of cultures (Brown, 1998).

The authors' study leads them to conclude that PSE is a political institution in its own right and is predicated upon the assertion that the value and beliefs expressed amongst a wider population of professions and functions have been aggregated and institutionalised to form a coherent but tacitly articulated culture. Characterising PSE as a political institution offers an explanation as to why a variety of functions and local government workers still subscribe to its values.

Despite the outlined extended period of reform, Pratchett and Wingfield conclude that there is still widespread acceptance and adherence to the PSE, but that its permanence is under threat from continued reform and an influx of workers whose outlook may be anchored in the tenets of public managerialism. The PSE appears to possess great durability and resilience and subsequently has an appeal that militates the complexity and ambiguities of a potentially confused political and organisational existence (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996).

Closely related to the PSE is the concept of tradition – the relationship between beliefs and actions (Orr & Vince, 2007). Fourteen separate traditions have been described that dissuade the argument that local government comprises a homogenous organisational entity but rather that it possesses a melange of voices, interests and assumptions about how best to organise, prioritise and mobilise action. Interpreting the interactions and interrelationships between these traditions provides an appreciation of the complexity of local government (Orr & Vince, 2007).

Nevertheless it is maintained that the impact of tradition and ethos is profound as actors behave according to the norms and conventions that are conditioned by both the formal and informal institution (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996).

#### **3.2.4 Ambiguity in local government**

On analysing the tradition and ethos of local government both Pratchett and Wingfield (1996) and Orr and Vince (2007) have introduced the concept of ambiguity to the work experiences of public sector workers. This section will build upon the previous sections

and argues that ambiguity is integral to the experiences of working within local government.

As stated in Chapter Two a lack of appreciation of ambiguity in organisational settings is a concern for critical scholars. particularly in the way ambiguity affects leadership practice.

Scholars of the public sector have identified ambiguity as an highly important factor in organisational functioning but have alluded also to the possibility that public sector organisations may inherently possess higher degrees of ambiguity (Lee et al, 2009), predominantly as a result of more ambiguous goals than other types of organisation. Goal ambiguity is seen as a function of three dimensions; external political control, management capacity and task routineness. Levels of ambiguity can, in turn, have significant effects on the general performance of the organisation (Lee et al, 2009).

It has been suggested, particularly from political scientists involved in the study of bureaucracy, that politics has an impact on public organisations. Rarely, however, are such studies developed to incorporate the impact politics may have on organisational behaviour at the individual level. In a study designed to accomplish this Pandey and Wright (2006) conclude that political influence can have considerable impact on organisational goal ambiguity and on employee role ambiguity. This is particularly apparent when structural mechanisms that are designed to control or direct employee behaviour can hinder performance when goals are complex, not agreed or poorly communicated. This finding may shed light on the potential distinctions between public and private organisations in that public organisations are likely to experience external agencies with considerable influence over resources, decision-making and organisational goals (Pandey & Wright, 2006).

In ambiguous situations, individual actors look to their institutions to help interpret the course of action to be undertaken (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003) and behave according to the norms and conventions that are conditioned by both the formal and informal institution (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). Contrast this logic of appropriateness affiliated with traditional public administration with the logic of consequence that pervades much of new public management. Ambiguity underscores the equivocal nature of social reality but it remains near impossible to give an unequivocal account of ambiguous conditions; yet there is a strong case for a reliance on circumstantial evidence in supporting the relevance and importance of ambiguity (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003). It is the contention of Noordegraaf and Abma amongst others that public managers handle the interpretive spaces created by ambiguity with a reliance on institutional tradition, ethos and expectation, as opposed to resorting to normative managerial practices of reducing the interpretive space through the application of increasing amounts of data and analysis.

### 3.3 Conclusions

This chapter has presented some of the most pertinent themes related to reform in local government, its history and impacts. The new public management phenomenon is shown to be a deliberate imperative initiated by the Thatcher administration in which the private sector is utilised as an exemplar referent in order to improve service provision but also to change the inherent cultures of public sector workers. The cultural clash between traditional public administration and the modernising agenda of public managerialism is shown to have been continued by the New Labour policy of developing a third way between markets and hierarchy.

The consequences of successive government reform are presented and studies are outlined which show that opinion as to the value of reform and the imposition of NPM is not universal. Unintended consequences range from internal cultural clashes between the traditional and the 'modern' (Orr & Vince, 2007; Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996) on the one hand and a diversion away from the core responsibilities of government on the other (du Gay, 2006; Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). Organisational ambiguity within the public sector is considered to be high, relative to private sector counterparts (Lee et al, 2009). Interpretive spaces created by ambiguity are inherent within local government and are influenced by a number of factors (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003; Orr & Vince, 2007; Pandey & Wright, 2006; Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). Methods of coping have relied upon the formal and informal institution, and internal political institutions such as the public sector ethos. These methods of coping are shown to be under threat from the encroachment of government promoted managerialism, influenced heavily by the private sector.

The literature reviewed above presents contextual detail as to the environment within which the relationship between leaders and followers is played out. This level of insight is important in considering a holistic appreciation of leadership beyond traditional normative understanding. Within the context as outlined above the Blair government in the UK, influenced by normative and functionalist conceptualisation of leadership drawn from mainstream academia and the practices of the corporate world, has specifically raised the importance and practice of leadership as a solution to the perceived inefficiencies of the public sector public (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001).

## **Chapter 4 - Methodological considerations**

This chapter demonstrates those methodological issues considered and resolved in order to undertake a successful study. In the first instance, the emergence of aims shows how the scope of the study was finalised after contact with some of the respondents under study. It outlines the underpinnings of the critical theoretical method before describing the variants of a critical ethnographic approach. After establishing the veracity of the method, the chapter outlines the various criteria of the research design demonstrating what considerations were made to ensure the validity of the research findings.

### **4.1. Emergence of the aims**

The aim of this study is to utilise a critical theoretical qualitative methodology to examine empirical material so as to make interpretations concerning the dynamics of the leader follower relationships within a large unitary local authority based in Northern England. The objectives of this study have been laid out in an earlier chapter but in practice the scope of the study emerged after earlier contact with respondents shaped the focus of the enquiry. Conversations with officers and elected members of the authority in the course of gaining access were surprising, in that initial attempts to gain insights into the leadership process lacked focus, as conversations drifted toward structural elements of the organisation. These appeared to shape peoples' expectations of behaviours significantly, in relation to leaders and followers, but were contrary to those represented by traditional understanding of leadership. This suggests that reductionist study of the dyadic relationship conducted within a functionalist methodology did not appear appropriate for dealing with the inherent complexities of the leadership process within the organisation. It was these initial insights that served to shape and focus the inquiry, necessitating a more critical interpretation of the empirical materials collected.

The plan of study was accepted in July 2007 with the fieldwork proper commencing immediately after, and final interviews completed in September 2008. The bulk of the observation took place between July to May 2008 and continued until September 2008. In order to achieve the aims of the research a major requirement was for the leader follower relationship to be explored in depth and in context. Subsequent interviews were conducted in order to clarify issues and assist with subsequent interpretation.

The authority under study had recently been restructured to comprise four Directorate (service providing) departments, supported at the centre by an administrative Corporate Services Directorate. In addition to these, there exists a smaller department comprising the Chief Executive's Unit. The initial plan of study was to spend time engaged in observation of all the constituent parts of the authority. Due to the size and complexity of the various departments and the desire to explore issues developed through interpretation, the initial research plan was revised so that time was spent within three of the principal departments.



Access was negotiated with each departmental Director individually, following a letter of introduction written and circulated by the elected member of the ruling political party and Leader of the Council. Following the introduction an invitation to attend the officer's executive committee, referred to as the Corporate Management Team (CMT), was gained at which an opportunity to present the research design and a broad statement concerning the aims and focus of the study to the most senior heads of service within the authority was made possible. Free and full access was gained during the course of the study with the only limitation being that members of the authority were granted full confidentiality. Should issues of confidentiality have arisen during observation it was agreed to retire from the room until the item under discussion was completed. In practice, however, this never happened.

The field notes of each observed activity were written up long hand into a Journal and were based on the notes taken during the time of the observation. During the writing of field notes and during periods of reflection preliminary interpretations were made. These informed subsequent observations and areas of focus for interviews. As such, the process of study can be perceived as an iterative process with the collation of empirical material being informed by what had occurred in earlier activities, and by observations and interview responses. The intention of the research process was to follow themes, as they occurred, in order to uncover leader follower dynamics as they unfolded. Kuhn (1990) is critical of the tendency of researchers to impose a planned sequence of discovery so that, within the final writing, discoveries are presented as occurring in a series of logically coherent steps, when in reality the process was far more chaotic. The above description of the research process presents a 'clean' version of the process as it actually happened. In reality, opportunities for observation and interviews were missed due to conflicting work and time requirements. Furthermore, the authority, in their desire to help, made invitations to attend work activities so that it became practically impossible to observe the work place "naturally" or without a chaperone. Finally, comments made by actors aroused interest due to the resonance they triggered with prior experiences and understandings; further consideration of these may have prejudiced the taking into full account issues with more pertinence to a critical theoretical approach.

#### **4.2. Critical theoretical methodology**

It is the contention of this study that the field of leadership studies has been dominated by the research methodologies drawn from management science and psychology (Rost, 1993; Western, 2008), which are typified by neo-positivistic/normative assumptions with an emphasis on rules and procedures for the securing of objectivity in practice and results (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a). As a result, the mainstream accounts of leadership studies can be criticised in a number of ways. Principal among them is that the utilisation of a similar methodology has resulted in a coalescing of theory to the extent that there still remain significant gaps in the understanding of the phenomenon (Parry, 1998).

*“...the yield of knowledge is much less than would be expected from the immense literature on leadership”*

**Yukl (1989 p.279)**

Other authors, Alvesson in particular, are more scathing about the results of nearly 60 years of research in leadership studies.

*“If the philosophical assumptions and rules for method were sound, then one or a set of empirically well-supported theories, explaining leadership phenomena and providing valuable advice for practitioners, would have been produced. But this is not the case and rather than calling for five thousand more studies according to the logic ‘more of (almost) the same’ - the time has come for radical re-thinking.”*

**Alvesson & Sköldberg (1996 p.457).**

The traditional research method and its shortcomings have been recognised by a number of influential scholars who have in turn made calls for the adoption of alternative research methodologies to broaden understanding related to leadership phenomenon. (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005; Bryman, 1996; Knights & Willmott, 1992; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). These authors have drawn particular critical attention to forms of abstract empiricism based on the use of quantitative methods and are not advocating a wholesale shift toward an abstract empiricism based on qualitative methods. The choice of research method is not limited to a choice between quantitative or qualitative approach, which represents an oversimplified dichotomisation, as the choice and adequacy of the method embodies a variety of assumptions regarding the nature of and attainment of knowledge and assumptions regarding the object under investigation (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Whilst the debate over method is not one that is exclusively concerned with a polarisation of methodological options, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2005), as an example, maintain that much of what comprises qualitative method in practice is underpinned by the neo-positivistic foundations to which it ostensibly opposes. It is recognised that there is a move toward general support for qualitative method and, subsequently, the adoption of a qualitative method would more adequately represent the depth and complexity of the leadership phenomenon than alternatives.

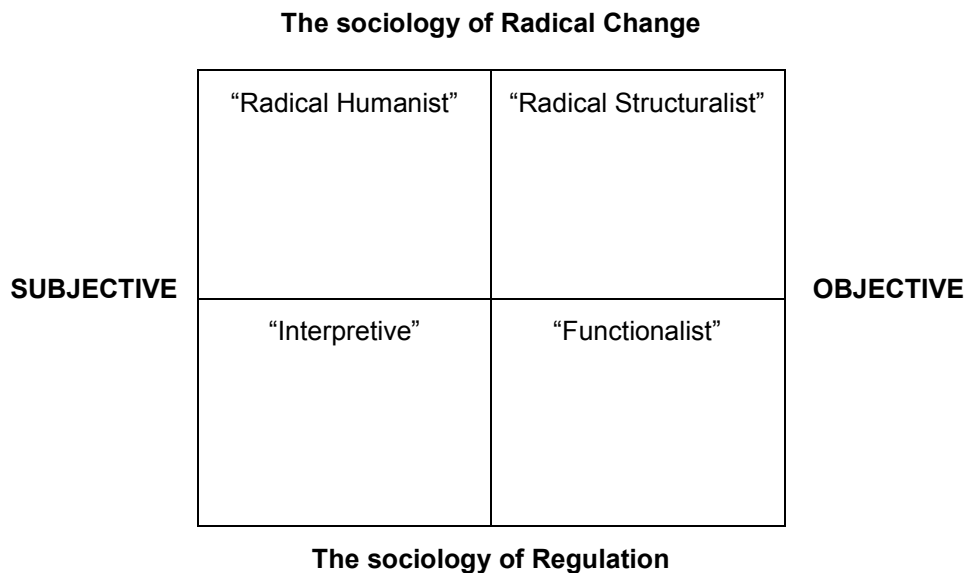
Burrell and Morgan (1979) draw upon diverse traditions of social organisational analysis to identify four fundamentally different lenses through which social and organisational realities can be interpreted. By taking direction from Alvesson and Willmott (2001), the four paradigms are differentiated by assumptions that are made about science and society. The first assumption relates to objectivist and subjectivist philosophies of science. Objective philosophies assume an existence ‘out there’ that can be captured by the application of ‘scientific’ methods. The reality of the social world is assumed to be similar to, if not exactly the same as, the natural world and, as such, social phenomena

can be observed and measured using equivalent methods; typically the careful construction of objective instruments such as questionnaires designed to provide comparative information about the variables under study.

Subjectivist philosophies of science assume that social phenomena are fundamentally different from natural phenomena where measurement by objective instruments is not possible. The social world is understood to be continuously constructed, reproduced and transformed through inter-subjective processes. Only through attention to the meanings of the processes is reality made 'objectively' real to its members and an adequate appreciation of the social world made. Typically, this methodology requires a close involvement with those under study to discover how the meaning of concepts are formulated and interpreted, and how this meaning alters over time.

The second assumption of Burrell and Morgan's framework relates to theories of regulation at one end of a spectrum and theories of radical change at the other end. Theories of regulation assume that modern societies are characterised more by order than conflict. Evidence of order is interpreted as reflective of a fundamental equilibrium and consensus amongst members. Disorder is treated as a temporary and necessary means of re-establishing equilibrium. Consensus is a broad assumption and attention is given to how cohesiveness and functional adaptation is achieved. Social order is assumed to be because of an accord between the constituent elements of organisation and society, and attention is given to how the mechanisms of order can be maintained and strengthened.

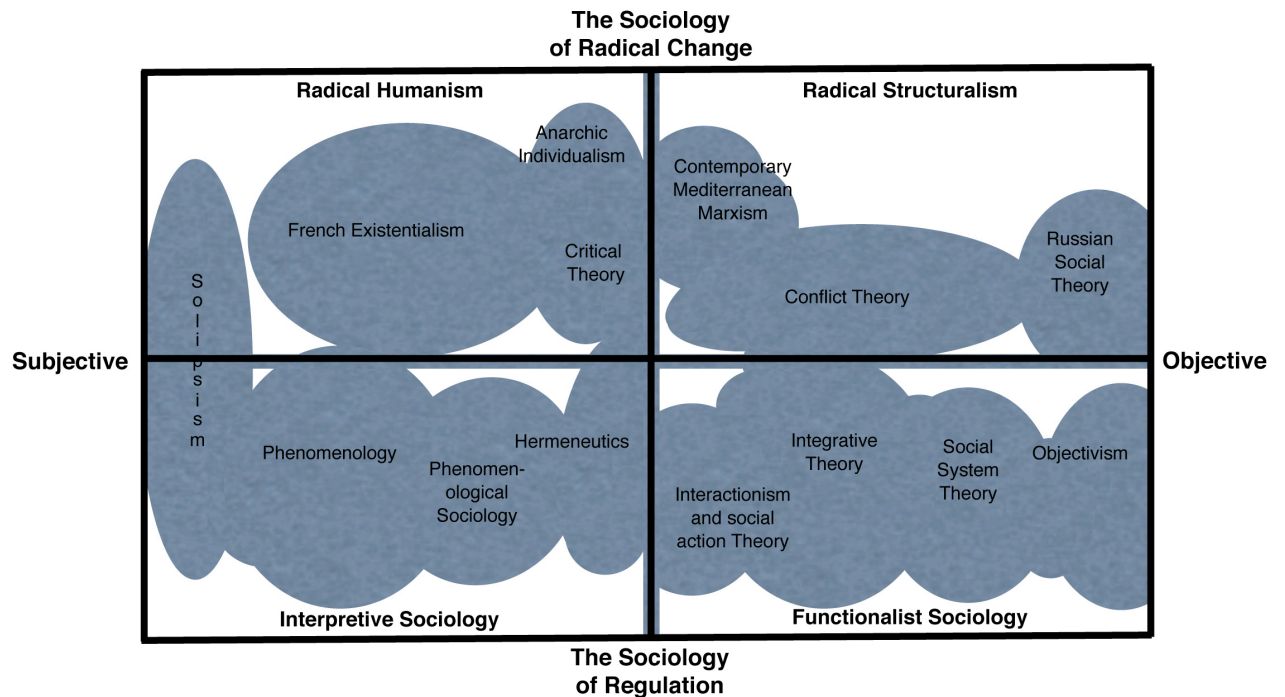
Theories of radical change, in contrast, assume that social relations are conditioned by contradictory pressures for transformation rather than by forces of integration and continuity. Evidence of consensus is associated with forms of social domination that impose order through direct repression or a repressive form of tolerance in which dissenting voices are tolerated or marginalised. The appearance of order therefore is because of mass subordination and/or insidious forms of socialisation. From this perspective the reproduction and transformation of prevailing institutions and routines is understood to depend upon institutionalised inequalities or injustices. When diverse sources of tension combine and prove resistant to suppression or accommodation, major expression of revolt and radical change may occur. How the above dimensions combine to inform four distinct paradigms in which each defines fundamentally different perspectives for the analysis of social phenomena is shown in figure 4.1 below. The paradigm to be adopted in research is dependent upon answers to questions that relate directly to the nature of society (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008)



**Figure 4.1 Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory** (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.22)

#### **An outline of Burrell and Morgan’s social research model**

The four paradigms are classified as functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist. These world views reflect the major traditions in social thought and embrace a number of distinct yet related modes of theorising. The functionalist paradigm is based on reality assumptions generating positivist and systems-oriented explanations of social life. The assumptions of the interpretive paradigm shape phenomenology and the concern to understand how reality is socially constructed. The radical humanist paradigm builds on assumptions that have supported critical theory and express a concern to reveal the power dimension underlying our social constructions (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a). The radical structuralist paradigm has given rise to various Weberian and Marxian analyses of social life concerned with understanding the modes of domination embedded in social structures and the contradictions that generate social change. The interplay of the four sociological paradigms and associated theoretical perspectives are shown in figure 4.2 below (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).



**Figure 4.2 The four sociological research paradigms** (Burrell & Morgan, 1979 p29)

Contributors to leadership studies have asserted that much of the research has been conducted within the functionalist paradigm (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a; Collinson, 2006; Kelemen & Rumens, 2008; Parry, 1998; Watkins, 1989; Western, 2008) and that this methodological myopia has resulted in a low return in knowledge (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, 1996), due to the narrow conceptualisation of leadership itself (Rost, 1993). In the following section, the functionalist paradigm is further outlined before illuminating the radical humanist paradigm within which critical theory is located.

### **The functionalist paradigm**

This paradigm combines an objectivist philosophy of science, with a regulation theory of society and is identified as the dominant research paradigm in social science with the comment that it tends to be

*“...highly pragmatic in orientation... problem oriented in approach... firmly committed to a philosophy of social engineering as a basis of social change.”*

**(Burrell & Morgan, 1979 p.26)**

Empirical observations are presented as data or facts, from which unequivocal statements of ‘reality’ may be derived. It is then possible to gain a reasonable basis for empirically grounded conclusions as a step toward generalisations and theory building (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). Alvesson and Willmott (2001) note how knowledge based upon assumptions of this kind has dominated management textbooks and the teaching of the major business schools. The authors suggest that part of the reasoning behind the

dominance of the functionalist paradigm could be attributed to the widespread preference of functionalist metaphors that reify the operation of systems and privilege their survival (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001).

Historically, studies of management have tended to treat concepts such as leadership as if meaning were self evident and as if workplace processes were largely determined by an abstract logic irrespective of human volition and thought (Collinson, 2003). Academics within leadership studies have stated that many of the problems associated with leadership research are a consequence of the research paradigm involved (Alvesson, 1996). A continued focus on superior-subordinate relationships to the exclusion of other leader functions, organisational and environmental factors that significantly affect leader practice contribute to this. Leadership research has been primarily concerned with generic leadership functions, to the exclusion of specific behavioural manifestations of these functions; Furthermore, the diverse styles (mannerisms) by which leader behaviours are enacted have been largely ignored. The result is that much of our understanding about leadership is not easily operationalised in practical settings (House & Aditya, 1997).

Although functionalism remains highly influential in leadership studies, it has been heavily criticised in social theory for interpreting conflict purely in terms of its contribution to social order and for aligning with the interests of the powerful (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). By also discounting agents' reasons for their actions, functionalism has a tendency to derogate the subject. Within leadership studies this is particularly evident in the recurrent neglect of followers (Collinson, 2005).

### **The radical humanist paradigm**

The radical humanist paradigm is typified by a concern related to the development of a sociology of radical change from a subjectivist standpoint; it views the world from a perspective that tends to be nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and idiographic. The radical humanists' paradigm understands social order as a product of coercion, rather than consent, and supports a view of society overthrowing or transcending the limitations of existing social arrangements and can, therefore, be appreciated as a brand of social theorising designed to provide a critique of the status quo. It exhibits a tendency to see society as anti-human that extends to a concern with the articulation of the ways in which human beings can transcend those limitations which tie them to existing social patterns and constraints, therefore enabling their full potential. The radical humanist paradigm in essence is based upon an inversion of the basis of the functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), and, as such, is the one that is adopted within this study.

Critical theory (CT) has probably been the most influential of a number of approaches that may exist in the radical humanist paradigm (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001). Positioned in the least subjective area and adjacent to radical structuralism, it contrasts strongly from

the unmediated materialism of the aforementioned paradigm. Critical theory places greater emphasis on the role of ideas in the formation and reproduction of society. The potential for change for the radical humanist therefore resides in contradictions between the human capacity to be creative and self-determining in ways, which could be seen to be fundamentally challenging to the reproduction of dominant structures and the status quo.

Through critiques of existing social structures, radical humanism makes an appeal to all those oppressed within, and alienated from, modern institutions. The mission is therefore, firstly, to raise awareness of how 'normality' is oppressive and then to facilitate the liberation of individuals from oppressive states of mental incarceration. Radical humanists would see that all individuals are victims of systemic oppression – an oppression taken for granted, it inevitably becomes appreciated as part of 'life'. Nevertheless, they would assert that when such life experiences are subject to critical reflection such perspectives could inspire opposition to forces of control.

Within the radical humanist paradigm, CT is best viewed as a key resource for advancing ideas and practices that share a commitment to the construction of a more rational society (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2001). CT has consistently stressed the Weberian view that the key to the understanding of human interaction is through the meaning and ideologies by which institutions are changed. In management and organisation studies, an ideological extension of Taylorism can be appreciated as a mode of technocratic thinking in that managers are presented as impartial experts whose authority is legitimised by the possession of particular specialist knowledge that leads to successive increases in efficiency – the pursuit of which becomes a new ideology; a new form of control.

In studying leadership, the study itself may mean reproducing and reaffirming the 'leader' category's interests and positions as well as contributing to the institutionalism of leadership as such. Ideas expressed in research about the nature of leadership not only reflect 'objective' conditions; they also constitute them. If 'strong' leadership receives a high degree of focus, it also acquires an elevated importance in social practice. Both leaders and non-leaders come to believe that leadership is essential to successful operations and act accordingly. Leadership becomes therefore an ideal for a variety of social relations. Consequently the practice of an idealised form of leadership may mean strengthening and legitimising asymmetric social relations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

### **Critical methodology**

Within critical theoretical approaches, there is no definitive or broadly agreed procedure for research practice. This has led to criticisms about critical studies, stating that it is an ivory tower approach that has little to say to managers and practitioners, failing to connect the outputs of research to organisational problems facing those people in organisations.

Whilst it has been suggested that common to critical approaches to management research is the acknowledgement that research outcomes are not value free (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008), critical theoretical scholars may point to the emancipatory value at the core of such methods as a way of negating the above perceived shortfall. Critical management research aims to reduce the limitations on thinking, feeling and relating to established practices, values and institutions. Ideals such as '*defamiliarization*' - making the well known, natural and self evident into something strange, arbitrary and possible to redo and undo - and *dissensus* - disruptions of consensus and seemingly harmonious, robust meanings - may comprise overall object guidelines. Each of these goals may in turn be linked to critical theory's core optimistic goals of facilitating emancipation (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a).

It is the contention here that we live in a world ruled by ideologies and practices of managerialism and as such are justified in referring to the 'managerialization' of the world. (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006a). In this light, the point of all learning and reflection is to change and develop our understandings in order to reduce illusion. Learning as the reduction of illusion and ignorance, can help reduce the authority of hitherto unacknowledged constraints, dogmas and falsehoods (Sayer, 2000). Whilst this may appear obvious on one level, it is often ignored, as one is socialised into the ways of thinking associated with the conventional view of knowledge as a mirror or external representation of the world. Critical management research is therefore important as an antidote to this, as critical theoretical and other associated research platforms offer very powerful stimuli for rethinking about contemporary society and its institutions (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006a). An implication is that as researchers attempt to uncover emancipatory change in their work they stimulate similar changes in others.

Critical theory does not replace research on what *is* with a criticism of what *is*, plus a view of what might *be* from the perspective of emancipation, it also notes that people within a society possess a capacity that remains dormant and consequently acknowledges that unrealised capacity may become active, leading to lasting change. If learning is not to change peoples understanding of the world and themselves in it, it remains therefore, only for the edification of the elite. With this in mind it should be noted that the emancipatory intentions of this study, in common with others (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008), whilst valid, remain less grand.

It is also acknowledged that there may be a cost to emancipation and the associated costs should not be glibly glossed over, as the price to be paid for forms of liberation from dominant ideologies, may be high. For example the outcome of increased freedoms and creativity at work - which are likely priorities emerging from critical reflection and emancipatory change - may be reduced wages and consumption (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2001). Emancipation involves a trade off between certain gains and certain losses. People may have reasons for refusing emancipatory invitations, including both the fear of



failure and the fear of the successful emancipatory change. These fears may only be dealt with, if they are addressed openly and not dismissed as 'irrationality'. Furthermore, the dynamics and dialectics of an emancipatory project means that there exists the possibility that an idea or intended practice can be subverted in its practical application. Critique and liberation from the old dogma is simply replaced by a new dogma (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2001)

A focus for this study is how emancipation may be achieved through stimulation of debate and disturbance informing a more democratic and empowered workplace and working practices. In this case, the research outcomes should have something to say to actors - managers and other employees - that is relevant to their situation. This calls for appreciation of the work situation; of the contingencies and constraints of their work practices.

The literature on critical theory and methodology is sparse and apart from general guidance in line with the emancipatory aims as outline above, seldom has anything concrete to say about practical methodology (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). A shortage of empirical studies, is to a minor extent therefore, a consequence of the lack of methodologies for critical management research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006a). Nevertheless such studies do exist and without intending to cover all the possibilities, attention will be drawn to three versions of empirical research that are feasible from a critical emancipatory perspective.

### **Critical ethnography**

Generally, critical approaches do not prioritise empirical studies, those that do, are closely related to conventional inductive or interpretive ethnography. A critical element may be possible but they tend to be limited in extent (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). Researchers work in a broadly traditional way whilst trying to consider themes and questions in light of the domination versus emancipatory context and interpret these in light of critical theory. Thomas (1993) suggests that a critical ethnography accentuates the repressive aspects of a culture. It chooses its subject (focus) in terms of injustices and is more inclined to scepticism with regard to data and interviews. It adopts a defamiliarising role in its interpretations (avoiding established paths emphasising the non-natural or strange). It considers language in relation to power and reflects upon the process itself, both to the researchers' involvement and to the broader relevance of the research. Thomas contends that through the above process the outlined form of critical ethnography can counteract the focus on professional technique and authority that characterises the majority of empirical studies in the social sciences.

A fundamental part of a critical ethnography is the constant use of negation – attempting to see things not as natural or rational but as exotic and arbitrary – an expression of action and thinking within fixed conformist patterns (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a; Alvesson

& Sköldbberg, 2005). Critical theoretical interpretation can involve considerable reflection and, as such, extensive empirical materials are difficult to integrate into such reflections (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). In a critical ethnography, therefore, a possibility is to select from the main body of the material itself parts that appear to be particularly pertinent to the emancipatory intent of the study. In practical terms this would mean that despite the fieldwork being as comprehensive as in a conventional ethnography, the compilation of the empirical material and descriptions of objects can be reduced and more time therefore devoted to interpretive reflection (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). The shaping of text with a critical ethnography would be the same as a conventional ethnography with the focus on empirical descriptions but with interpretations of a more critical nature (Thomas, 1993).

### **Focused critical ethnography – “close reading”**

A variant of the full-scale ethnography is to go further in concentrating the empirical focus as outlined above. In a focused critical ethnography it is a question of making a fairly qualified interpretation of a more limited level of material on the basis of a relatively extensive basic knowledge of the object of study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). This research strategy could be to pick out something from the broader empirical context, which illuminates the theme in question, and is amenable to critical interpretation, and focus on that. This methodological strategy has been referred to as an intensive critical interpretation or “close reading” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). The important point here is that the researcher, by way of conducting the fieldwork, has gained a qualified understanding of the context within which the phenomenon occurs. This understanding with a theoretical framework guides the empirical focus. A limited empirical material is subject to a close reading and careful critical-interpretive focus. It would appear that critical empirical studies within organisation studies have concentrated upon the study of specific situations in which dominating actors have sought to define reality for their subordinates within an organisation (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b; Collinson, 2003; Knights & Willmott, 1992).

### **Theoretical methodology**

A third variant is for the critical researcher to work primarily on a theoretical level; using, synthesising and interpreting existing studies whilst adding smaller empirical studies of their own. The researcher uses a small proportion of the empirical material collected; the remainder is not subject to such intensive analysis as in the variants above.

Within this study a critical ethnography based upon the conditions cited by Thomas (1993) was conducted over a 16 month period and empirical materials collected in the form of documents, field notes and interviews. In the conduct of the ethnography a qualified understanding of the context, enhanced by the researcher's working relationship with the organisation under study, was obtained. Reflection on the materials allowed

themes to emerge and these informed the focus of the fieldwork and the subsequent collection of further empirical materials. Further concentration of the empirical material informed by a “close reading” elicited interpretations on ‘*illustrative*’ examples of the object of study and are presented in chapters 5-10. A focus on the research design and the process of reflection is provided in the following sections.

### **4.3 Research design**

#### **Introduction**

This section outlines the research design. The introduction covers the reasons and parameters of the study, after which the research design is described in fuller detail. The final segment of this section deals with the attempts made to ensure credibility of the study.

This study covers the dynamics of the leader follower relationship within a large unitary local authority in northern England. In studying leaders and followers undergoing their normal work activities, a critical theoretical methodology was utilised to uncover and interpret the dynamics of the relationship.

Local authorities have undergone extensive pressure from governments to reform their service provision. This external pressure has created a movement of change within local authorities and the public sector referred to as the new public management (Rhodes, 1991). It is the contention of this study that local authorities are subject to extreme pressures rendering the work context highly complex and ambiguous. Normative understandings of leadership as produced by extensive research studies conducted within the functional paradigm have failed to uncover knowledge that either illuminates leadership processes or offers constructive advice to leaders and followers alike (Alvesson, 1996).

This study offers insights into the ways in which leaders and followers operate within local authority environments and, as a conclusion, supply understanding into leadership that goes beyond normative conceptualisations, thus stimulating dialogues and discourses concerning the concepts of leading and following that may provide an emancipatory consideration of the roles individuals undertake within organisations. As an example, leaders and followers within normative understandings are perceived as a superordinate and subordinate dyad. Leadership is something that happens to followers who, through some form of social influence process, undergo a realignment in line with the leader's aspirations, which in turn increases identification with the leader and the organisation; enhancing follower motivations, commitment to the leader's vision and, ultimately, raises organisational performance (Bass, 1999). This interpretation, does not take into account the complexity and ambiguities related to the interplay of organisational context dependent dynamics such as power and politics. These dynamics may support the view that followers are not a homogenous mass, but are vitally important in the construction of, and the perceived successes of, leaders and leadership (Collinson, 2005, 2006; Grint, 2005a; Knights & Willmott, 1992).

#### **4.3.1 Research design**

This study was conducted using a variant of a critical ethnography informed by the principles outlined by Thomas (1993) but moderated as a response to the complexity of the interpretations involved (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2005). As a consequence the research methodology utilised in this study may be referred to as a close reading or intensive critical interpretation (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2005).

The Leader of the Council wrote an introductory letter to colleagues throughout the authority in support of the study. In response to this letter, preliminary conversations were established at which the terms of access were agreed and initial insights informing the scope of the study became evident. For example, a member of the political leadership, a leader of one of the opposition parties, had served for many years as a local councillor and had been Leader of the Council in previous administrations. During conversations, the Councillor voiced opinion concerning the frustrations of being a Councillor, of a lack of focus and the rise of 'technocracy' within the authority.

The research design was initially undertaken as a critical ethnography. Thomas (1993) cites the following points to consider in undertaking a critical study; ontology, selecting a topic, method, analysis and interpretation of data, discourse and reflection on the whole research process. Each of these points is considered in turn in order to illustrate and summarise the research design utilised here.

#### **Ontology**

Critical theoretical studies begin from the premise that the structure and content of social life oppresses individuals within that culture or society. Critical theoretical approaches to social research therefore generally advocate for the emancipation of groups marginalised within society (Thomas, 1993). Critical management research aims to follow the spirit of critical theoretical research but focuses on management phenomena (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006b). Within management studies, this may relate to the asymmetrical power relations within organisations or to the perceived superiority of management insights, knowledge and practice. Assumptions such as these have become entrenched and reinforced by functionalist research practices which are open to challenge by critical theoretical scholars operating from the radical humanist standpoint.

#### **Selecting a topic**

Factors pertinent to management studies are equally applicable to leadership studies taken as a branch of management studies. In addition, leadership in practice has been elevated to a level of importance because of the popularity of neo-charismatic models, apparently, to supersede management practices. The results derived from mainstream research on such models show followers as not only requiring leaders but also actively searching for them. In addition, leaders themselves are exposed to heightened

expectations from recruiters and employers who stipulate the need for heroic levels of performance.

The focus of this study is to examine and interpret the dynamic of the relationship between leaders and followers in their normal work environment. Functionalist literature maintains that the relationship between the two is a social influence process but this process is not well understood (Parry, 1998). Whilst this may be so, the theoretical conceptualisation related to leaders and followers do not take into account the interplay of power and politics within the work environment, nor do they take into account the ambiguities and complexities of the work context.

This study is built upon a wide-ranging body of existing literature and the conclusions drawn from it are to be utilised as guidelines, as opposed to truths, to be either confirmed or refuted. Whilst acknowledging that research is value laden (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008), a guarded stance must be incorporated to ensure that data is not gathered in order to prove a point. This study has argued that much of leadership research has not considered the full complexity of the object of study and, consequently, a research topic has been chosen that is deliberately open ended allowing for the possibility of a change of perspective during data collection and reflection/interpretation.

## **Method**

The technique through which data is collected is not a neutral process; how it is collected can dramatically shape the critical potential of a project (Thomas, 1993).

### **Data sources**

The study is concerned with the dynamics of the relationship between leader and followers. Steps have been made, therefore, to observe leaders and followers in their normal workplace engaging their usual work practices. Initial conversations with members of the organisation under observation informed thematic concepts to be focused upon during the course of the extended observation. Subsequently, informal interviews were undertaken with members of the work force during observation and during break and work related social occasions. Documents related to the activities observed were also collected and interviews were set up involving those principal actors in the scenarios observed. A summary of the data sources is provided in table 4.1 below.

### **Accuracy of evidence**

Whilst it has been asserted that the accuracy of evidence is not a critical factor in methods which are alternatives to quantifiable studies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), observational and reporting rigour has been maintained through the scrutiny of data. Thomas (1993) warns against the imposition of research values through the use of leading questions. Whilst attempts have been made

to negate this in collecting data, on occasion interviewees were deliberately provoked in order to elicit a response. Where this occurred further questioning and conversation concerning the point made was undertaken in order to clarify the interviewee's intention and meaning where possible. Where deliberate prompting has occurred, it has been noted in the presentation of the empirical material.

DEPARTMENT	HOURS/INTERVIEWS
<b>City Development</b>	<b>126 hours</b>
Observations Interview 1 – Director Trent Interview 2 – Chief Officer Soar Interview 3 – Chief Officer Idle Interview 4 – Head of Service, Cultural Events Interview 5 – Chief Officer Leen Interview 6 – Chief Officer Maun Interview 7 – Chief Officer Poulter Interview 8 – Chief Officer Erewash	24 <sup>th</sup> April 2008 19 <sup>th</sup> February 2008 22 <sup>nd</sup> February 2008 22 <sup>nd</sup> February 2008 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2008 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2008 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2008 22 <sup>nd</sup> April 2008
<b>Housing and Neighbourhoods Lincoln</b>	<b>24 hours</b>
Observations Interview 9 – Chief Officer Welland	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2008
<b>Children's Services</b>	<b>31 hours</b>
Observations Interview 10 – Head of Service Interview 11 – Chief Officer Manifold Interview 12 – Area Manager	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2007 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2008 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2008
<b>Central Services (including Chief Executive's Unit)</b>	<b>90 hours</b>
Observations Interview 13 – Chief Officer Penk Interview 14 – Head of Service, Admin Interview 15 – Head of Service, Diversity Interview 16 – Head of Strategic Human Resources Interview 17 – Chief Executive Interview 18 – Senior Officer Interview 19 – Assistant Chief Executive	17 <sup>th</sup> August 2007 17 <sup>th</sup> August 2007 18 <sup>th</sup> August 2007 19 <sup>th</sup> February 2008 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2008 22 <sup>nd</sup> April 2008 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2008
<b>Adult Social Services</b>	<b>nil</b>
<b>General Observations</b>	<b>54 hours</b>

**Figure 4.3 Data sources**

#### Data collection

In order to fulfil a critical study the researcher must be aware of inconsistencies or contradictory statements, or occurrences that are made and witnessed. Such anomalies when pursued may lead to surprising insights and information.

Consequently, a structured questionnaire was not utilised but a short list of four or five areas 'to be covered' based upon previous fieldwork, which was used as a guide for the interviews undertaken. In conducting interviews that were more informal, the interviewee was allowed to talk freely with minimal prompting from the researcher.

## Conceptualisation

Following the initial collection of empirical materials, areas of thematic focus began to emerge as greater understanding of the work context began to be understood. Periods of conceptualising and interpretation were scheduled through the interview and observation process. As the fieldwork progressed ad hoc, opportunities for further observation and interview became available and so the period of conceptualising, in such cases, may necessarily have been curtailed or postponed. On such occasions, time away from the fieldwork allowed for clarification of thoughts and decisions concerning further themes for exploration to be made.

## Interpretation and analysis

The interpretation of data requires a defamiliarisation process in which the observations are translated into something new. Defamiliarisation is a process of distancing oneself from the empirical material collected. According to Thomas (1993), a critical ethnography resembles literary criticism in that the researcher seeks non-literal meanings in the data-texts.

In order to interpret the data fully a process of 'funnelling' the empirical material occurred. This involved an iterative process of visiting various observed scenarios and associated field notes in order to arrive at those scenarios utilised for interpretation. This probably required a process of familiarisation as distinct from, and before the process of defamiliarisation. The illustrative potential of scenarios that were concerned specifically with the interactions of leaders and followers, the leadership topic or meetings related to particular leader follower relationships were prioritised.

After choosing specific illustrative scenarios, the collation of documentation involving field notes, other supporting documentary evidence and recorded transcripts of interviews pertaining to the scenario was completed. Subsequently, much of the empirical material collected was discarded at this stage but the familiarity with the material did impinge upon the interpretive process. Continual iterative interpretation allowed the framing of the familiar in a different perspective.

Interpretations were explored primarily with the thesis supervisors and, subsequently, in ad hoc conversations with members of the organisation. The researcher was invited to a 'wrap up'- meeting with members of the Chief Executives Unit in which the research interpretations were discussed in order that misinterpretations and blind spots were covered adequately.

During this questioning process, the research position used in the study became a minor obstacle, but was also illuminating. As the members of the Chief Executives Unit were senior managers and designated leaders within the organisation they were resistant to



issues related to the asymmetries of power, the positioning of themselves as followers and the political bias of relationships despite evidence to the contrary (Hales, 2002). However, despite initial reluctance, issues related to the principal dynamics of the leader follower relationship were acknowledged.

### **Discourse**

Linguistic exchange, and therefore all interaction, entails a form of symbolic domination, in that pre-naming shapes cognition and discourse. This especially includes the 'authority' of scholars and academics. The critical ethnographer's goal is to examine both the language of our data and the language with which researchers speak to identify characteristics of the culture that provide access toward the unblocking of alternative metaphors and meanings.

### **Reflection**

Ethnography requires the researcher to adopt the position of an active creator as opposed to that of a passive recorder of narratives or events. All ethnography requires systematic intellectual or personal involvement with the subjects regardless of whether reliance is upon artefacts or full immersion with the subjects themselves. Reflection refers to the act of rigorously examining how this involvement affects the data gathering, analysis and subsequent presentation to an audience. Through reflection - an act of continuously rethinking about the study - attempts were made to become more self-aware so that the possibility of neither gaining disproportionate empathy with the subjects, nor becoming disillusioned with the subjects or the study, was guarded against.

In undertaking reflection, a strategy of maintaining sympathy for the subjects under scrutiny was followed. Simultaneously, focusing on the areas of enquiry along with the actors ensured that the problem of distortion was reduced (Thomas, 1993). The problem of elevating and reinforcing leadership is replaced with an analysis of the dynamics of an influence relationship that may be considered as leadership.

### **Presentation of the material**

The chosen illustrations are presented as compact case studies, utilising studies already published as examples (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 1999; Knights & Willmott, 1992). In total, the empirical material presented comprises six separate illustrations. By title they are referred to as,

- **'From Good to Great'**
- **'The audit and regulatory framework'**
- **'The corporate leadership team'**
- **'Accountable and responsible'**

- **‘A management meeting’**
- **‘A meeting with the Leader’**

There is no chronological order to the scenarios as they are presented here, but a scenario may appear before another if its inclusion serves to assist in the understanding of the following scenario. Each illustration can be said to demonstrate daily life, as there is no suggestion that the scenarios as described here are not typical of day-to-day life of the organisation under study.

### **Criteria for empirical research**

The findings here are drawn from qualitative data sources. The criteria for establishing the soundness of qualitative findings differ fundamentally from those used to assess findings drawn from quantitative sources. This section outlines the processes involved in ensuring that a credible study was achieved within accepted standards.

The views advanced by critical theorist scholars have gone beyond the truth criterion – theory confirmed by empirical evidence reflecting ‘objective reality out there’ - as the ultimate yardstick for science (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). By emphasising the researchers, active construction of a reality – through perception, cognition and the handling of language as well as the social interaction with those involved in the research – a fundamental critique of the traditional empirical epistemology emerges. To this is added the historical and changeable nature of social phenomena, what might be ‘true’ in one context may not necessarily be ‘true’ in another. The concept of generality can be appreciated as a semantic issue within qualitative studies (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). Generality is not an issue confined to lower or higher levels of proof; as in reality there are not just two levels but an arbitrary number of them. The production of generality has not been a principal objective of this study as the aims are to make interpretations concerning the leader follower relation within the organisation under study, nevertheless the findings of the study may have the capacity to inform aspects of leader follower relationships in similar settings (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a).

From the perspective of critical theory it is important to note the way dominant institutions and ideologies are uncritically taken for granted and reproduced in research.

Researchers have a tendency to take for granted phenomena in a society to which they belong and, thus, pass on its fundamental values. Critical theory encourages a much more reflective emphasis than mainstream social science research. Within this reflective capacity lie the principal criteria for credible research from a critical theoretical perspective, namely the promotion of reflection, and emancipation from, frozen social and ideational patterns. Critical research should have something to say to actors – leaders and followers – that is of relevance to their particular situation (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a).

The critical-political dimension in research can be attributed, more or less, to a variety of factors ranging from the object of study to preference. Other knowledge interests have their parts to play in social science and, consequently an exclusive emancipatory cognitive interest may not be a requirement for all research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). It should be a requirement that researchers acknowledge they are working in the political-ideological continuum. The tensions between the reinforcement/reproduction of social order and the challenge to the same order should be made clear in the research context and, as such, researchers should avoid pandering to established thinking and dominating interests.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2005) assert that criteria for successes of qualitative research remain problematic, as the very definition of 'meaningful research' makes it impossible to lay down any rules - simple or ambiguous - for the evaluation of the research. Nevertheless, this study is required to display a level of proficiency and rigour, and as a consequence has utilised the following strategies in addition to outlining the emancipatory cognitive interest to ensure the success of the research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005p. 276).

- Empirical 'arguments' and credibility – in analysing the empirical material, attempts have been made to consider alternative 'arguments' to move beyond a 'functional fit' for the material under consideration. The arguments were discussed with actors within the organisation at the end of the fieldwork and informally with other actors at various times during the course of the fieldwork. Confirming and contradictory reactions to the arguments were proactively sought (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993).

An iterative process of data collection was used, meaning that the collection of material was informed by what had gone before. A period of reflection was undertaken to clarify thought processes and to allow for conceptualisation before embarking on the next intervention (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In order to make transparent the probable impact the researcher may have made on the study, personal information related to experience within organisations and the organisation under study, and to some of the actors involved, has been declared. In instances where the researcher has deliberately 'provoked' a response, this has been declared. Inevitably this declaration has forced an examination of the shared assumption held between the researcher and the participants of the study (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993).

- An open attitude to the vital importance of the interpretive dimension to social phenomena
- Critical reflection regarding the political ideological contexts of and issues in research

- An awareness of the ambiguity of language and its limited capacity to convey knowledge of a purely empirical reality

Periods of reflection were built into the data collection process to allow for the process of conceptualisation. Following the period of the fieldwork, the reduction of the empirical material in line with conducting a close reading required that the illustrations were valid examples of themes identified during the research. Further interpretation was embarked upon in the development of 'argument' in order to develop a 'richness of points' (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2005).

- Theory development

The implication for theory development based upon an understanding of the literature under review is made in the interpretive and concluding chapters of the study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the research process of collecting and interpreting data and has outlined how the findings will be presented in the final chapters. The chapter has shown how research aims emerged in response to initial conversations. The epistemological and methodological foundations for the study were examined before describing the research design including data collection, interpretation and presentation. This section concluded with an examination of criteria for research of this type.

## **Part Two**

### **Field Research: Data Illustrations and Interpretations**

## Chapter 5 - Introduction to Chapters 5 - 10

One of the criticisms of the normative models of leadership that have dominated the leadership research school since the mid 1980s is that they employ reductionist methodologies, leading to the simplification of the phenomenon being observed (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a; Western, 2008). The resulting leader-centric theories see leadership as a concept that exists devoid of context and in which other members of the relationship (followers) are theorised to be a blank slate upon which the leader writes the script (Jackson & Parry, 2008).

In order to combat this, each illustration is considered separately and, within each chapter, the illustration is coupled with interpretations drawn from within it. Each of the subsequent six chapters is structured in the same way.

Each chapter is comprised of four parts: firstly, background material is provided allowing for a more holistic appreciation of the illustration itself which, in turn, assists in a deeper and broader appreciation of the leadership phenomenon. Secondly, statements in support of the illustration drawn primarily from interviews are presented. These are presented as 'leader voices' and 'follower voices', which provide an opportunity to give space to a wider '*congregation of voices*' dependent upon the role played in the leader follower relationship. Leader voices come from members of a particular group that possess leadership responsibilities in its myriad forms. Follower voices mainly come from the population in receipt of the leadership activities. Thirdly, the illustration is presented. These comprise events witnessed during the fieldwork and are reproduced here from field notes and supporting materials collected at the time. It is the contention here that these illustrations are typical, or are at least not atypical, of regular occurrences within the organisation. Finally, the fourth part comprises interpretations of the empirical material leading to the identification of the dynamic(s) of the leader follower relationship.

It is recognised that in making a "choice" of the materials to be presented, the possibility of favouring some material and prejudicing others may exist. In funnelling and choosing the relevant supporting data from the total empirical materials collected, criticisms may be made concerning the use of functionalist methods, effectively, to reduce and simplify the evidence presented. Furthermore, it is recognised that within the categorisation there exists the distinct possibility that the population of the two constituent groups may ebb and flow, as a leader in one situation may play the role of follower in another.

It is considered that this style of presentation assists in the understanding of the data for the following three reasons. Firstly, this style is primarily a presentational tool and has been employed to portray complex organisational data. It is not asserted that the influence of any of this is limited to the section or illustration to which it has been associated in the body of the text. The additional supporting information given in this section could, and in all likelihood will, influence all of the illustrations given in these

chapters and is therefore integral to the richer appreciation of the leader follower relationship as a dynamic one. Against traditional research practice of limiting voices (categorising and synthesising) it is the intention to widen the voices heard and to seek variation in the empirical material (observation and interview) collected during the course of the fieldwork, allowing for more ambitious interpretation(s) (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). Secondly, the empirical materials are not presented *en masse* before the interpretations, as it is the intention to make a connection between the data and the interpretation(s). It is considered that to divorce the data from the interpretation would only serve to promote additional abstraction of the material and make the process of cross referencing material to interpretation laborious, complex and ineffectual. Finally, the data is presented in this way as it assists in the provocation of interpretations pertaining to the empirical work.

In the chapter, subsequent to the following six, the various interpretations and dynamics are brought together in order to provide for a more holistic appreciation of the dynamics of the leader follower relationship and, in particular, those drawn from a critical theoretical perspective.

The six illustrations outlined are as follows;

#### **Chapter 5 - “From Good to Great”**

This chapter concerns an organisational seminar arranged to introduce the methodology of an International Consulting Company (ICC) and its relationship between leadership, culture and performance. The Seminar was intended to form the bedrock of the ABC’s stated objective of developing leadership capacity within the organisation.

#### **Chapter 6 - The Audit and regulatory framework**

This chapter deals with a meeting at which the auditing of the legal and regulatory framework within which the ABC operates was made apparent.

#### **Chapter 7 - Corporate leadership team**

This chapter concerns a meeting of the corporate leadership team (CLT). The CLT is the main executive body of the organisation outside of the political structure. It comprises The Chief Executive, The Deputy and Assistant Chief Executives and all the Directors.

#### **Chapter 8 - Accountable and responsible**

This Chapter contains a composite illustration of a number of observations. The illustration concerns the Responsibility, Accountability Communication and Information (RACI) matrix and the response to it by chief officers (Followers)

## Chapter 9 - A management meeting

This Chapter focuses on a Director's Senior Management Team Meeting. The Director chairs the meeting, with chief officers of the Directorate in attendance.

## Chapter 10 - A meeting with the Leader

This illustration presents meetings between elected politicians and senior managers of the ABC.

Location	Northern England	Directorates	
Structure	Unitary Local Authority		Children's Services
Format of Administration	Coalition		City Development
Elected membership	99 councillors		Adult Social Services
Wards	33		Corporate Services
Size	40,000 acres		Neighbourhoods and Renewal
Population	840,000		
Combined Gross Expenditure on Services	£2.4 billion		

**Figure 5.1 Table of Information - ABC**



## Chapter 5 Illustration One:

*“...raised the issue of leadership, it’s on the agenda, we’re talking about it all the time, we’ve put in some training and some developmental work to try and explore that more....In the corporate context we’re looking at embedding leadership into appraisals and that sort of thing, but I’m not sure if we are going to do anything differently.”*

**Chief Officer Idle, City Development**

### 5.1 ‘From Good to Great’<sup>2</sup>

In the following section, an illustration related to the authority’s aspiration to develop the leadership capacity of the organisation focuses on the leadership related seminar “From Good to Great”. In the second section, interpretations of the empirical materials are provided. The interpretations suggest that the ABC, despite efforts to the contrary, holds an ambiguous position in relation to the identities and roles of leaders and followers. It is concluded that ambiguity is a significant dynamic in the leader follower relationship.

#### 5.1.1 Background

Before ‘From Good to Great’ the ABC had invested considerable amounts of time and money into leadership development within the organisation through the ‘Leadership in the City Programme’, which became known internally as the LCP1 and LCP2 programmes. The LCP1 Initiative was based upon the work of Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe and the public sector transformational leadership Model (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001). Aimed at senior ranking officers, it was universally received as being a worthwhile investment in time and resource. The LCP1 comprised a programme of training interventions, including some oriented toward ‘outward bound’ style activities of the type made famous by the military and, subsequently, endorsed by the world of management development. Following LCP1 the organisation became aware of a need for wider leadership skills within other supervisory levels of the organisation and therefore commissioned LCP2 that had at its core the ethos of dispersed leadership models, in that every one has the opportunity to be a leader.

Following an introductory conference, the various departments were allowed to continue leadership development with a minimum degree of formal control, but all the activity was badged as belonging to the LCP2 programme of development. Initial reaction to the LCP2

---

<sup>2</sup> The title of this seminar should not be confused with the work of the same name, **Collins, J. 2001. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't.** London: Random House. Whilst it may be possible that there is an awareness of Collins’ work, it was never referenced during the course of the seminar or at any other subsequent meetings and conversations concerning the ‘From Good to Great Seminar’.

programme was very favourable but the enthusiasm of the initial stages eventually withered. The amounts of energy required to keep such a self sustaining programme as LCP2 vital was underestimated and also was the amount of time required, as development activities became to be judged as encroaching on “work” time. LCP2, despite being well intentioned, well received and valuable to the delegates eventually degenerated into a lifeless husk of its envisaged self.

As a continuation of the ABC leadership development programme the organisation commissioned an international consulting company (ICC) to run a training and awareness day, which became titled as “From Good to Great”. It was later learned that the ICC had previously been commissioned to run a couple of smaller interventions within operational units of the ABC. Because of these interventions the two unit Heads had become confirmed supporters of the ICC programme, and through a continued programme of persistence the unit Heads had sought to leverage large levels of support from CLT members for the ICC programme. This was accomplished when eventually the ABC had committed the organisation to the ICC programme.

Not only can the “From Good to Great” initiative be appreciated as a natural continuation of leadership training that had occurred throughout the authority, it is also a consequence of the organisation’s aspirations to restructure, generate a more strategic focus and subsequently deal with those issues faced internally and externally by the ABC.

Much of the rationale for the “From Good to Great” intervention, as explained by one of the architects of the programme, is,

*“A lot of the senior managers were saying that ‘LCP2 was great, but it was a while ago and can we get some of that back’, and that’s what Good to Great was about.”*

**Senior Officer Admin, Chief Executive’s Unit**

It is at this juncture that the concept of leadership should be explored as to what leadership means and comprises to members of the ABC organisation.

### **5.1.2 Leader voices**

Due to the exposure of individuals to leadership, either directly through development interventions or through other less formal methods the organisation had developed a reasonably consistent concept of what leadership meant to the ABC. Below is a comment from a senior member of the management that was typical in many ways of a number of comments collected.

*“Leadership brings in woolly concepts like inspiring; and it should be about setting clear objectives and helping people deliver the objectives but not managing the process. The corporate view is that leadership is setting the*

*broad objective and helping people to get there, and I think there has been a very consistent approach.”*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

Leadership interpretations of the Corporate Centre are more likely to motivate beyond the pragmatic toward meeting the expectations of wider communities, and the business and media communities in particular.

*“We needed to do something radically different from what we had operated previously. In terms of the early discussions I took in some presentations that were very frank with the CLT which was saying, do you realise that this is how we are viewed, do you realise that there is a view within the city that the city council lacks effective leadership.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive’s Unit.**

Whilst this perspective exists it is possibly a reflection of the individual style of the Chief Executive whose personal style is very different from the more media savvy Chief Executives of unitary authorities of other neighbouring cities. The ABC leadership was regularly under scrutiny; primarily in the media and, subsequently, at events and functions throughout the city. Such scrutiny was usually accompanied by exhortations for a more charismatic and, vigorous leadership approach. The contention of the business community, in particular, was that the city lost out through not exhibiting a leadership platform typified by the transformational leadership approach. Despite this, however, the personal leadership style of the Chief Executive, in particular, was one that was welcomed by the vast majority of the ABC workforce.

*“You’re not a bruiser (name of CE), you’re more intellectual.”*

**Director Wheelock, Children’s Services**

A further contributing factor is likely to be the perception of the most senior officers of the ABC concerning the elected members of the authority.

*“Few of our politicians want to be true leaders. Their aspirations are limited to community needs and Ward based needs, so we don’t have any politician in a high profile position who has any aspiration to do something on the national stage.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive’s Unit**

It was noticeable that during the ‘From Good To Great’ conference no member of the elected membership was present. This was explained as follows,

*“That was probably due to lack of invitation.”*

*“Would they have come if you’d invited them?”*

*“Eventually.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive’s Unit**

In order to accommodate this gap the considered view of the ABC is that Officers need to ascend in order to fill the city leadership role. Subsequently, it is required that Strategic Directors demonstrate more leadership in order to comply with corporate assessments made identifying lack of vision and strategy. Furthermore, lower members of the hierarchy need to grow their leadership potential in order to deliver outcomes within the complex environment within which the ABC exists and, finally, the 'From Good to Great' workshop exhorted managers to resolve cultural differences through leadership interventions. Considering the multiplicity of messages concerning leadership aimed at the potential leader population, the potential for an ambiguous appreciation of leadership is self-evident. This ambiguity of expectation is heightened by a lack of clarity related to the task at hand or the “wicked problems” to be resolved and the methodology through which resolution can be achieved, typified by the following statement,

*“More and more we are meeting people whose behaviour says that the direction of travel is the right way to go...once that behaviour is seen, they are providing leadership, direction of which way to go. Head teachers are seeing that integration is the way to go, they are taking on a broader role beyond the education sphere...let’s provide really effective services that are joined up but let’s position ourselves so that we’re at the centre of it so we can drive it as well as being driven by it.”*

**Area Manager, Children’s Services**

**5.1.2 Follower voices**

From a follower perspective, concerns related to the ABC’s strategic plan and the practical meaning of 'One Council' were frequently voiced.

*“What’s the vision of the council, and I’m still not sure what our vision is...I’m not clear what one council means and what’s our role, I’m not clear about that – I’m feeling uncomfortable about the change programme...”*

**Chief Officer Erewash, City Development**

Furthermore, not only had some openly questioned the validity of the ICC approach to the management of change within the ABC, others had started to question the legitimacy of leadership as central to the whole change initiative and the development of the organisation itself.

*“There’s a philosophy behind the leadership thing that says that everyone can become a great leader and I don’t believe that.”*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

Behind an awareness of the possible limitations of leadership others, particularly those at lower levels of the organisation, were showing a great reluctance to acknowledge their own roles as followers.

It’s “more of a problem with the definition of follower”, one manager said. Nevertheless there was an uncomfortable block; a difficulty in assimilating following and being a follower, and certainly the concept of the duplicitous nature of a management role and the possibility of being both leader and follower did not seem to be entertained widely, if at all. As the following three fairly typical comments support,

*I may lead my team, but I don’t follow”*

**Head of Service, Cultural Events, City Development**

*“I don’t follow leaders. I have to find the tactic to get what I think is right... I’m not following leaders anymore.”*

**Head of Service, Housing & Neighbourhoods**

And,

*“I wouldn’t consider myself a follower...that doesn’t mean I’m a natural leader either... I would accept that I’m a supporter, if I’m on board then I am a great supporter.”*

**Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

Except within the HR function that appreciates,

*“The notion of a follower and following is much maligned within this authority, general management is not valued either, technical skills are valued and people play up to this.”*

**Head of Strategic Human Resources, Central Services.**

More critically, when pressed, members of the ABC would express their general concern relating to developments within the organisation. Occasionally this would surface as a more deep-rooted cynicism.

*“Management is about adhering to rule and procedures, it’s ok but it’s not about leading and inspiring people...so we bring in consultants to tell us what leadership is...I don’t need to be sold this stuff.”*

**Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

*“... it’s a fad isn’t it...part of it says that it’s a fad, what we need round here is a bit of common sense, get on with things and stop navel gazing...Increasingly I see things and I think it’s just bollocks...people are hiding behind jargon, concepts, potted theory.”*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

*“I think a lot of stuff that’s being pumped out now is kind of Harvard Business School type stuff, a lot of the stuff coming out is the next Emperor’s New Clothes.”*

**Chief Officer Idle, City Development**

Increased cynicism regarding leadership and the possibility of real change occurring

*“... raised the issue of leadership, it’s on the agenda, we’re talking about it all the time, we’ve put in some training and some developmental work to try and explore that more...In the corporate context we’re looking at embedding leadership into appraisals and that sort of thing, but I’m not sure if we are going to do anything differently.”*

*“We’re all about leadership now, it’s the new buzz word, it’s not changed what I do on a day to day basis, I’ve been re-badged”*

*“I go out for a drink with pals and one of them works for an engineering company and they are subject to this stuff but they usually get it before we do, and one day about three years ago we were laughing about “the elephant in the room... And then one day when we first started talking about From Good to Great he actually came with a picture of an elephant and I thought we’ve been laughing about this for years in the pub, we’re not even up to date with the Harvard Business School stuff.”*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

## 5.2 The illustration

'From Good to Great' took place in a venue hired specifically for the event and was a stylish corporate event with all the typically associated paraphernalia of internal communication and corporate professionalism. The main conference hall was set out to accommodate approximately 1,500 ABC delegates, comprising the most senior officers of the authority. All were invited to sit in informal groups around circular tables holding 10-12 delegates, but there was ample room in order to spread out. Prior to the conference, each delegate had received a personal invite to the event from the Chief Executive and on registration received a branded information pack concerning the day ahead.

The day was structured into two sections. The first consisted of the Directors endorsing their personal support, the issues to be faced and the journey ahead. These presentations by the senior leadership were very value laden and visionary but also less explicit, comprising mostly positive expressions and good intention, but noticeably very well received. The senior leadership were building a context that demonstrated how 'From Good to Great' was structurally essential to embedding the 'One Council' ethos. Nevertheless, after 45 minutes a number of the delegates were becoming restless and were starting to lose their sense of engagement. The impression was that they had heard much of this before.

*"We must build brilliance; release the magic and switch on to the potential..."*

**Chief Executive, City Education**

There was an overwhelming sense that what had been presented was well intentioned but perhaps a bit too real, too daunting - impossible? Scheduled to speak after the Directors was the Chief Executive, but the Deputy Chief Executive, who effectively concluded and handed on to the main speaker, took his place. The late change in speaker did not noticeably perturb the audience but every member of the senior leadership team except the Chief Executive had made a full endorsement.

The second section of the day consisted of a very accomplished presentation from a senior consultant of the International Consulting Company, presented with style and panache rather like a leading business guru, full of easy sound bites "Best practice comes from variance" and humour "How many of you were kids?". The speaker was concerned with demonstrating how to create a collective belief in the organisation so that everyone can make a difference, through a causal link between culture, leadership and performance. Effectively the speaker left the audience in the position of making it impossible not to believe the presentation and, therefore, not to fully endorse the programme as outlined. The speaker stated that there are two types of organisational culture: defensive and constructive. Constructive cultures are typified by growth. "I can't sing: but I can sing better". The assertion is therefore, that if one is not part of a constructive culture and supports the outlined prescriptive programme, then one must

inhabit the defensive culture and therefore represents a problem! It was a very skilful and accomplished presentation endorsing the ICC's methods and rationale that ultimately asks each delegate to decide which culture they identify with.

During the course of the day, opinion was canvassed concerning the 'From Good to Great' seminar; almost exclusively delegates were very supportive. Only one very senior officer had the courage of his own very critical interpretation. This officer is well known to the researcher as we have served together on Boards throughout the city and, perhaps, the familiarity between us allowed him to voice his opinions. However, it would also have been somewhat surprising to have not heard some form of well-reasoned critique of the initiative.

Given the almost universal acceptance of the seminar the concluding remarks were somewhat surprising. According to the agenda, the conclusion was to be made by the Chief Executive, who duly addressed the delegates. Firstly, he apologised for not being present for the whole of the day, as "other" duties had taken him away. Following a brief period of thanking the main speakers and summarising the presentations of the senior colleagues, he began to talk more openly about the challenges the organisation faced. Rather than fully endorsing the ICC and their programme, he rather remarkably distanced himself from the event by raising questions relevant to approach. Witnessed from the audience this submission was greeted with lots of outward shows of agreement - delegates seemed to need permission to allow themselves a more challenging disposition and therefore become more openly critical of the ICC and the day in general. This position was more openly evident in observations and interviews made in the following days.



### 5.3 Ambiguity

In this section, the illustration is broadly interpreted utilising the literature given in Chapter 2. Interpretations are made concerning the meaning of leadership to the ABC, the perceived value of following and the problem of fixing identities in a leadership relationship. It concludes by asserting that, due to the fluidity in identity, ambiguity is a significant dynamic in the leader follower relationship.

As reported in the previous section the ABC had been engaged in a comprehensive leadership development programme for some time. During the fieldwork this development programme had culminated in the 'From Good to Great' seminar, designed to promote leadership awareness and skills. This was to involve the adoption and distribution of the methodologies of an international consulting company referred to within this study as the International Consulting Company (ICC). It should be made clear from the outset that the development of exemplary leaders and leadership processes within the ABC was believed to be vital to the attainment of the ABC's business plans and had therefore been formally expressed in all the corporate planning literature.

What is immediately striking about the ABC's attitude to leadership is the initial, almost universal, acceptance of leadership as a vital commodity to be developed within the ABC community. Interviews with senior ranking officers, as outlined in 5.1, demonstrate that the ABC had gained the opinion that there was a shortage of leadership within the organisation. Consequently, it felt under pressure to demonstrate leadership internally and externally in order to promote the ABC more effectively amongst city stakeholders, throughout the region and across the local and national government sectors. This is a view that was shared by the UK government concerning leadership in the public sector more generally and is very heavily promoted in its own publications (Cabinet Office, 2001b).

From this point of conjunction, questions concerning the understanding of leadership and the kind of leadership to be developed provoked answers that are less sure and definite. If leadership is an organisational component, what kind of leadership is being referred to? Reference to the government's own publication does not help as the document provides a rather comprehensive literature review that makes clear the inadequacies in understanding referred to in earlier chapters and confirmed by numerous contributors from within the field (Bryman, 1996; House & Aditya, 1997; Jackson & Parry, 2008; Rost, 1993; Yukl, 2002)

Western (2008) asserts that functional models of leadership have become the dominant normative models of leadership theory and, consequently, this is replicated within the ABC. During interviews with prominent members of the ABC management team, statements were collected regarding leadership and what it meant to the ABC population. Presented below is a statement considered typical of the viewpoints held more generally.

*“Leadership brings in woolly concepts like inspiring and it should be about setting clear objectives and helping people deliver the objectives but not managing the process. The corporate view is that leadership is setting the broad objective and helping people to get there, and I think there has been a very consistent approach.”*

This statement combined with the ‘visionary’ perspective of the ABC strategic literature (Council Business Plan, 2008), leads to the conclusion that the attainment of ‘One Council’ represents a Corporate vision; requiring, therefore, a leadership as outlined in neo-charismatic leadership theories (Beyer, 1999; House & Aditya, 1997), typified by full range leadership theory (Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994a) and the public sector transformational leadership Model (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004). Whilst the ICC did not specifically outline its model of leadership or the causal/practical links between Leadership-Culture-Performance, much of the supporting presentations provided by the Directors of the ABC, during the ‘From Good to Great’ seminar were ‘visionary’ in content.

*“...we must build brilliance; release the magic and switch on to the potential...”*

Statements such as the one above allow for the reasonable conclusion that this appeal to a higher motivated follower population alludes very strongly to a neo-charismatic, normative model of leadership.

Alternative opinions regarding leadership were canvassed, and whilst other models were loosely touched upon; it is the contention here that the neo-charismatic model is highly dominant, at the very least at the outset of the fieldwork. From this observed conclusion, attention needs to be given to the reasons behind the dominance of the model and it is considered that this is due to four contributing factors.

The first factor concerns matters related to the nature of local government and the reform imposed upon it by central government. As outlined in chapter 2 it is the contention of this study that normative models of leadership are at their core a product of a functionalist paradigm (Rost, 1993; Western, 2008). The new public management defined earlier as, essentially, managerialism and economic rationalism is underpinned by the same research traditions as normative models of leadership (Parker & Guthrie, 1993). It is asserted here that the promotion of these models in conjunction with a progressive move toward greater managerialism not only supports the promotion of the models, it is also mutually sustaining (Bryman, 1996).

The second contributing factor relates to the complexity of the task to be undertaken by the ABC, complex societal issues that have no immediate or easily understood resolution. These ‘wicked problems’ are considered to be those matters to which effective leadership is seen as being a major contributing factor toward solving (Grint, 2005b). Problems of

this type tend to be ambiguous in terms of defining both the root cause and nature of the problem and, therefore, also the suitability of a workable solution. At times of great uncertainty, normative models theorise that a leader will emerge in order to convey solutions to 'wicked problems' (Bass, 1985). Informed by the theoretical models, the emerging leader has charismatic status and is likely to be perceived, therefore, as being 'heroic' by followers. It is also inferred that as the leader raises the performance of the followers the influence of transformational leadership is shared throughout the organisation (Burns, 1978). It is the contention here that the concept of emergence and sharing heroism is strongly appealing, an attraction made more potent by the ambiguous nature of the work environment shared.

The third contributing factor relates to an expectation of what effective leadership should look like. Rost (1993), amongst others, has provided a persuasive argument which states that normative forms of leadership have gained inflated levels of acceptance. The models produced from a functional perspective have a tendency to reduce the complexity of the phenomenon under scrutiny and, therefore, become more readily assimilated by a wider practising population. This represents a commodification of leadership supported, in turn, by those with a vested interest in the financial value of leadership (Mintzberg, 2004).

This phenomenon, in turn, is further aggravated by reproducing and reinforcing 'leader categories' and, therefore, leads to an institutionalisation of normative leadership theories (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006b). If leadership, be it heroic or otherwise, receives enough attention it gains importance in social situations. In the case of the ABC, deficiencies of public sector service provision are well reported (Toynbee, 2009), suggesting that effective leadership is the solution. Media and business stakeholders within the city have made very public depositions for more leadership from the city as an important factor in competing with cities perceived as being more successful locally. The leaders of the comparator cities are judged to be more charismatic and therefore 'leaderful' than those of the ABC. Simply put, expectations of leadership as voiced by those agencies force the ABC into aspiring to adopt normative models.

The final contributing factor is possibly the most significant and the most clearly evident. Central government as a purchaser of "leadership" promotes normative neo-charismatic theories of leadership as they are most immediate and theoretically replicable. It is asserted that this, along with the factors outlined above, close off the possibility of any alternative to a prescriptive and widely held view of leadership.

As normative leadership understanding is evident within the ABC, the view of following does not hold the same currency. If there are leaders there must be followers (Kellerman, 2008). If this is the case then they would appear to be absent from the ABC.

*"I may lead my team, but I don't follow"*

*"I don't follow leaders; I have to find the tactic to get what I think is right...  
I'm not following leaders anymore."*

*"I wouldn't consider myself a follower...that doesn't mean I'm a natural  
leader either... I would accept that I'm a supporter, if I'm on board then I am  
a great supporter."*

From a leader perspective the appreciation and awareness of normative leadership models holds significant currency within the ABC. This is not reflected in the follower perspective where the concept of following suffers almost universal rejection. This questions the viability of leadership practice and the possibility of a wider acceptance of the model if one constituent part of the leader follower relationship declines to accept its leadership responsibilities. Burns (1978) amongst other neo-charismatic scholars maintains that the process of leadership is a joint process, shared through all levels of the organisation. For normative models of leadership to be endorsed and utilised within the organisation followers must acquiesce to the potency of such models and practices. The fact that this is not evident within the ABC, except when referring from the first person perspective, is a compelling indication that overt evidence of such leadership practice is rare.

As followers are disassociating themselves from following, they demonstrate that they are not a compliant population. Leaders and followers have expressed a view concerning leadership enforced by expectation and tradition. In practice, however, followers in particular appear to have rejected the notion of following and, therefore, their involvement in the leader follower relationship as expressed in normative terms. If what is occurring between leaders and followers within the ABC is a complex form of leadership, this study confirms the view of Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003b) that the construct in its functional normative guise is open to serious question.

One further interpretation needs to be addressed because of the empirical material presented in the previous section. Statements collected suggest that leaders, when expressing their views on leadership are also acting in accordance with expectation, as when pressed their earlier sentiments regarding leadership may be seen as hopeful rhetoric.

*"...so we bring in consultants to tell us what leadership is...I don't need to be sold this stuff."*

*"... it's a fad isn't it...part of it says that it's a fad, what we need round here is a bit of common sense, get on with things and stop navel-gazing...Increasingly I see things and I think it's just bollocks...people are hiding behind jargon, concepts, potted theory."*

*"We're all about leadership now, it's the new buzzword, it's not changed what I do on a day to day basis; I've been re-badged"*

The rhetorical nature of the commitments expressed about leadership, and 'From Good to Great' in particular, is of interest and promotes a complex view of the leader follower relationship. In earlier localised interventions, the ICC had gained considerable support from managers within the ABC. Commitment to the initiative was almost universally expressed at the 'From Good to Great' seminar. Over time, nevertheless overt support for the seminar and for the primacy of leadership development withered and statements such as those presented above and throughout this study became more and more commonplace. It is asserted here that the use of the consulting company has an ambiguous affect on the members of the ABC. Zanzi and O'Neill (2001) in a study concerning the positive and negative aspect of politics at work concluded that the use of expert outside help could be perceived in both ways. Alternatively, the expression of positive or negative opinion regarding the use of consultants is unlikely to be explicitly for or against; in all probability people will feel both positive and negative toward the consultants, dependent on the situation and other contributing factors the individual is exposed to at the time of expressing their opinion. Over time as expectations are not met the likelihood is that opinion will become more negative and people start to react accordingly by providing less support or deliberately impeding progress.

Interpretations of the data suggest that leadership is held in esteem and the position of leader is desirable. The position of follower has no such appeal. It is the contention here that the fixing of identities as leader and follower as within a normative framework is difficult and potentially dangerous. On the one hand, actors have been seduced by the romanticism of leadership as defined by the organisation's rhetoric, and on the other are reluctant to be seen as followers. Choosing instead to adopt a pejorative view of the function, a perception made worse by the confusion related to the practise of leadership and the ambivalence shown to the ICC and their interventions.

A post-structuralist view of following suggests that followers may possess many identities (Collinson, 2006) and the possibility that one of these may be 'leader' must be given credence. Whilst leader-centric viewpoints devalue the perspective of follower, all leaders have to play the role of follower more often than they may be aware. This is evident within the ABC as designated formal leaders, such as the Strategic Directors, also significantly follow an elected membership as well as superordinate officers and peers. Furthermore, a public sector ethos underpinning a notion of consensus (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996) demands those leaders elected or organisationally constituted - follow. The role any agent plays is highly complex, ambiguous and therefore open to interpretation.

In conclusion it has been suggested here that the models of leadership voiced by individuals within the ABC do not bear up to scrutiny but are understandable given

the high levels of societal pressure to conform to expected leadership behaviours. In terms of an influence relationship between leaders and followers, however, the relationship as constituted is not along normative lines. The organisation possesses high degrees of ambiguity in structure and in task definition. This ambiguity pervades the organisation by its very nature and therefore impacts upon the fixing of the roles of leader and follower. It is asserted here that the roles are highly fluid and that individuals in the act of leading do so from a rehearsed platform of following enforced through practice, consensus, accountability and structural pressures. When the identity of who are leaders and who are followers becomes more fluid, as within the ABC, it is concluded that the principal dynamic of the leader follower relationship is ambiguity.

## **Chapter 6 - illustration 2:**

*"We're always going on about bureaucracy, the policies and procedures are getting in the way. Are they helpful or hindering? We know why they are there, because of public money and accountability."*

**Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

### **6.1 The audit and regulatory framework**

This next illustration is particularly focused on the ABC's regulatory framework. The illustration is concerned with a preliminary meeting set up to establish the scope of assessment leading to a Corporate Assessment (CA) and Joint Area Review (JAR) of the effectiveness of the ABC's corporate centre and Children's Services Directorate.

Interpretation of this illustration suggests that the bureaucratic apparatus, both internal and external, is so powerful a dynamic, it can be seen as being the leader in a relationship with the ABC. It is asserted in this study that leadership cannot be appreciated devoid of the context within which it is located and, subsequently, the contextual environment is identified as a significant dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

#### **6.1.1 Background**

Within the ABC, and the Public Sector generally, there exists a strong tradition of accountability as part of a public sector ethos. The reforms of central Labour government, recently culminating in the commissioning and publication of the 'Modernising Government' policy (Cabinet Office, 1999), specifically attempt to increase the performance of the public sector. In doing so it has adopted a functionally managerialist perspective through imposing a series of wide ranging performance measures for government administrators, both central and local. Furthermore, the government's spending watchdog, the National Audit Office, whilst not directly responsible for the auditing of local government finances, is responsible for the audit of The Department for Communities and Local Government and other ministerial departments who have delegated service provision to Local Authorities. This reinforces the concept of public financial accountability and the imperative of searching for 'best value' within the public sector and the local government community.

In responding to the requirements of public accountability which has been made more acute by legislative changes such as the 'Freedom of Information Act' (Cabinet Office, 2000b), the ABC employs a rigorous internal programme of balances, checks and scrutiny. This comprises Scrutiny Committees, chaired by elected members, which oversee the activities of the Council. Not surprisingly, in order to serve the demands of such committees the ABC has developed an extensive bureaucracy; external audits related to financial accountability, assessments of performance against stated objectives

and assurances related to public accountability.

The assessments were conducted by government agencies – The Audit Commission and OFSTED. In chapter 3 the regulatory and auditing framework as experienced by the ABC was outlined; as a further addition to this the complexity of the reporting framework agreed by the ABC is presented in figure 6.1 below. This illustration refers back to this framework and provides more detail regarding the auditing framework imposed on the



**Figure 6.1 The ABC planning framework (Council Business Plan, 2008 p.8).**

authority.

Central government regularly audits the effectiveness of service delivery and inspects the corporate effectiveness of the internal processes, procedures, legislative compliance and financial management systems. During the fieldwork, the ABC was assessed as part of the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment (CA) for corporate effectiveness and OFSTED's Joint Area Review (JAR) for service delivery in Children's Services. Both the CA and the JAR assessors are independent government auditors whose assessments can have significant impacts upon the authority being examined. A failing authority may have special measures taken against it which may include the insertion of Whitehall administrators appointed to manage the affairs of the authority. In practice this never happens but the senior management team and politicians may be called to stand before a Public Accounts Committee hearing or account for shortfalls before Parliament.

In conversation with many of the members of the CLT and with members of the corporate



centre, the objective of attaining a 4 star appraisal as part of the corporate assessment (CA) process was at the forefront of the ABC's ambitions. This had become a particular issue for two specific reasons; firstly, the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) of the previous year(s) had delivered a 4 star assessment. In order for the ABC to maintain this status, the CA needed to match the CPA assessment. Secondly, from a national perspective the 4 star award gained considerable prestige for the city, region, organisation and the members of the senior leadership in particular. It was somewhat of a surprise therefore that the attainment of the 4 star award did not rate with such significance with the elected membership who approached the assessment as a process likely to provide them with opportunities to identify shortfalls in performance.

#### **6.1.2 Leader voices**

A factor that was commented upon frequently from both the leader and follower perspectives was the bureaucracy of the organisation. It is maintained that central government and the strictures related to 'public accountability', as the examples given above demonstrate, contribute significantly to the seemingly all-encompassing situation within the ABC. In addition, some of the comments made by senior ranking officers have suggested other possible antecedents for the make-up of the administrative life of the council.

*"This is a very conservative council, cautious, risk averse. It's not ... if I had a pound for every time someone said to me we do it this way because four years ago it went badly and we now have this process in place, it seems like overkill...I've got numerous examples..."*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

And,

*"The Council historically had a culture where members called Officers to account over spending and the rest...bullying Officers and that mentality still underpins that process... some of the processes that are in place are a reaction to the gross overspending, so that when you're at scrutiny board the members have disappeared."*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

This last statement is particularly telling as it refers to the belief at least that whilst elected members are formally responsible for adherence to budgets and, in particular, those budgets associated with capital projects, overspends are answered by officers in isolation from their elected counterparts. This supports the view that whilst the 'bullying' of overspending officers may be less than overt, it is still the officers that formally assume responsibility for issues related to financial accountability.

It would appear that the perceived rigorous nature of scrutiny and checking underpinned by a seemingly pervasive bureaucracy produces an internal dichotomy. On the one hand the bureaucratic framework is understood and appreciated as vital,

*“There are frameworks on how you should best do things such as options appraisals. There’s nothing worse than a bad report... There’s an acceptance amongst most of the officer core that we want good quality reports.”*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

Nevertheless, on the other hand, it is acknowledged that in practice the policies and procedure of doing business within the ABC can be appreciated as being less than helpful.

*“We’re always going on about bureaucracy; the policies and procedures are getting in the way. Are they helpful or hindering? We know why they are there, because of public money and accountability.”*

**Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

This, in turn, leads to an element of frustration,

*“Privileged and yet exasperation with the politics and trying to make sure that the processes don’t become the most important thing, that actually what we achieve is that the processes help... as a big bureaucratic organisation we are really good at processes, we can do them to death!”*

**Director Trent, City Development**

### **6.1.3 Follower voices**

Many of the statements taken from a leader perspective allude to an element of frustration caused by the constraints that the bureaucratic framework imposes upon the workplace. However, the frustrations expressed are concerned primarily with the restrictions of senior managers and their relationships with elected members and the framework itself. Additional statements, however, from the same population of managers show that frustrations may also be derived from less senior managers’ interpretation of the bureaucratic framework.

*“Here I get a five page report to spend £7,900 pounds, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8...8 [counting] pages... that has come to me to make a decision, that is an amazing waste of time. How much has that cost - probably upwards of a £1,000 to make a decision to spend 7,900 quid – utter nonsense... and that’s the downside and that replicates all over and this goes on to an executive member and it is an utter nonsense of decision making, the process is slow and over bureaucratic.”*

**Chief Officer Erewash, City Development**

And,

*“... he had to sign for a 200 quid shed.”*

*“It was a £500 shed actually – 2 ½ pages for a £500 shed!”*

**Chief Officer Erewash, City Development**

However, additional statements from those in the middle of the management hierarchy show that frustrations become compounded,

*“But the systems we have to work in are absolutely Byzantine... How do you get over those?”*

**Head of Service, Children’s Services**

The example of delegated sign off being restricted to the point that a £500 purchase is not possible without authorisation suggests that the managers who have substantial budget authority feel restricted in committing those budgets; either due to formal or informal reasons, most likely a combination of both. The senior management body seemingly feels more equipped to negotiate the bureaucratic framework as it exists.

*“Rules, regulations, policies, procedures, practices and a whole host of people doing things on daily basis... in a sense the ability of the successful people to get up and run the place is those that can find their way around the policies, procedures and practices. If you understand them, you can find your way through them rather than round them; round them implies that you’re avoiding them. How do you use those policies to best advantage...and knowing when you can break them and when you can’t?”*

**Chief Officer Idle, City Development**

*“...and then I said who is the report to and I was told that I had to write it to myself, I said I’m not going to do it, it’s a complete nonsense... it doesn’t get me in to trouble because of the role I’m in.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executives Unit**

However, the final statement concerning the bureaucratic framework is probably most telling,

*“Procedures can be changed but not over any form of longevity”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executives Unit**

## 6.2 The illustration

The committee room for the preliminary meeting regarding the Corporate Assessment/Joint Area Review was a very large room with space for an excess of 50 delegates situated around large wooden benches organised as a room sized rectangle with a void in the middle. The room was mostly wood panelled and seemed a bit old fashioned and was set out with a meeting PA system of personal microphones and speakers. The members of the meeting spread out around the room even though the total number attending was only 15. Each member insisted on utilising the room PA when it was not required. This added a very surreal quality to the meeting as instructions for use were continually reiterated, and failed attempts to use the system occurred frequently leading to extensive repetition; extending the meeting and producing a rather bizarre and comic scenario.

At the end of the room, where the Chair of a council committee meeting would sit, were positioned the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive. To their immediate right but at the far bottom end of the wooden rectangle sat the assessors. It was immediately apparent how difficult it was to conduct an effective meeting and signs of frustrations started to creep in to the mannerisms of some of the attendees. At no point did anyone suggestion a reordering of the room to make the meeting more conducive. It seemed that people would rather soldier on as it was rather than make an impolite or unwarranted suggestion. The Chief Executive had placed himself in the position of formal authority at the top of table but appeared to recognise that he wasn't officiating the meeting and looked uncomfortable. The assessors on the other hand felt it their position to defer to the Chair and the Chief Executive and did not overplay the hand dealt to them by the fact that they were the assessors empowered by legislation, the audit commission and OFSTED. The result was that the meeting was stilted, drawn out, repetitive, formal and deferential.

The meeting was opened by the Chief Executive, who first explained that the meeting was due to be chaired by Councillors Wharfe and Nidd (The joint Leaders of the ABC), but they had sent their apologies as they had been detained by some emergency business and were in a 'crisis meeting'. The use of the word 'crisis' was very casual giving the impression that the organisation itself was under no particular threat and that the crisis could be seen as a code to assert that this was political/personal<sup>3</sup>. Nobody gave

---

<sup>3</sup> Later in the week a telephone call with Councillor Wharfe revealed the nature of the meeting, in that he had felt compelled to tender his resignation as leader of the party and with this was to stand down as Leader of the Council after the successful completion of a party leadership election. Later a more full account of the conversations and the reasons leading up to them were given, but for the sake of anonymity and betraying a confidence little can be recounted here, save for the fact that the machinations of the political leadership illustrates the pervasive nature of politicking and the prevalence of political tactics throughout the ABC. This lends credence to the description of the ABC as a

undue attention to the announcement that the two leaders were engaged in a crisis meeting. Next, the Chief Executive gave a 5-minute opening statement about the importance and value of the assessment and the ABC's aspirations of the assessment. As was typical of the CE the statement was full of light humour and was self deprecating

*"Events are all under control... they are under control... Yes?... I wish!"*

After which he formally handed over to the Assessment Team(s).

There were two distinct groups of assessors, one from the audit commission (John) and one from OFSTED (Wendy). John began by introducing himself as the "lead" and the remainder of the team, and which member of that team was to be the deputy leader. The areas of assessment closely followed central government guidance and priorities. Whilst the core of the presentation was easily followed, it was heavily laden with very specific jargon and acronyms making the detail of the presentation unintelligible to anyone from outside of this particular work sector. The tone of the presentation and, therefore, one assumed the audit to follow, was one of transparency and of providing assistance. Language and phrases such as *"areas of strength and areas for focus"*, *"deal with successes, strengths, challenges and priorities... areas we would like to see more focus."* were comforting and deliberately conciliatory. Finally, John outlined a timetable for the assessment before handing over to Wendy. The second presentation followed the presentation from John almost identically, being sector specific but even more laden with jargon and acronyms. The JAR assessment would focus on the 5 shared priority areas and on *"...four areas of high delivery across the authority."* The sense of duplication and repetition was palpable; both groups of assessors mentioned issues of *"...diversity as a cross cutting initiative"*, leaving one feeling like the auditors were checking the assessors and, consequently, where would the cycle of continuous checking end. Obvious displays of anxiety from the officers present were noted; fidgeting, shuffling of papers; almost as if the assessors were referring to areas in which those officers present were aware of specific *"areas for focus"*.

The only real contribution made by the officers present was related to issues of timetable for assessment as related to the Youth Offending Service. It was declared by all that a robust discussion had taken at the end of which the officers had been granted some concessions in the itinerary. Despite this, nobody looked any more comfortable than before the concessions were made. At this stage the room had been joined by Councillor Nidd, who after a summing up from the CE regarding assurances of cooperation interspersed with the usual element of humour *"I'd like to tell you we're raring to go...But!"* He made what were intended to be closing remarks that lent heavily on rhetoric and

management cliché - *“period of change”, “move fast enough”, “adopt flexible postures...to maximise opportunities”* and the use of a frequently heard ABC phrase applied to external consultants and/or partners, *“critical friends”*. Despite Councillor Nidd’s concluding remarks the Chief Executive felt obliged, effectively, to conclude before breaking up the meeting so the assessors could continue separate meetings with their respective constituent groups.

The assessment team led by Wendy stayed in the large committee room whilst John’s team left with the responsible officers of the corporate centre, leaving the officers with responsibility for children’s services behind. As the changeover commenced more officers joined the meeting, making the numbers present similar to before. Wendy moved from the bottom right hand corner of the room to the top table and took the place vacated by the Chief Executive. Again, introductions were made and the meeting took a very similar path to the earlier one. Three other observations were noted. Firstly the meeting dealt with more level of detail as the assessors’ brief is to assess the service; with more detail came more jargon and a bewildering level of acronym. Lifelong learning network, APA process, LAC, LDD, CAMS, YOS<sup>4</sup> are examples of acronyms noted, and are merely representative as the meaning of them was never uncovered. Later it was learnt that many of the acronyms refer to areas of service related to potentially difficult clients. LDD for instance is Learning Difficulties and Disability, the acronym therefore has a strange way of depersonalising the individuals being discussed.

The second observation concerned the fact that the CA process and JAR assessment were to run concurrently and, in addition, along with the consulting group, KPMG was contracted to audit the CA, JAR and CAP assessments. Furthermore, the Youth offending service was also to be scrutinised by a different team of regulators and then again under the JAR assessment. In this apparent duplication, one particular assessor, Mike, would conduct both assessments; this was referred to as *“synergy”*.

The third observation relates to the assurances given by the assessing team that the assessment would be conducted in a fair, supportive and transparent way. When reading out a list of areas to be covered, the officers asked the assessor to slow down. He replied, *“I’ll give you this”*, referring to the list he was reading from. *“...the purpose of the JAR is,*

*... not to add to the bureaucracy...,*

*... collaborative and open...,*

*...to be very straightforward with you...”*

---

<sup>4</sup> These acronyms were noted in the field-work notes. It is not clear as to what they refer and are included as being indicative of the type of language used by both the assessors and the officers of the ABC.

The impression was that the assessor team was there as enablers and the whole process was to be as painless as possible; the consensual nature of the discussions and agreements related to timetable and further communication gave the impression that officers had some control over the process.

### 6.3 The environment

In the previous chapter, evidence was presented and interpretations made to conclude that the roles of leader and follower are ambiguous concepts and comprise, therefore, a principal dynamic of the leader follower relationship. In this section, the arguments of the previous chapter and the evidence provided in the previous section is built upon to explore issues related to the construct of leadership itself and who/what provides the predominant leading influence.

It was concluded that the environment within which the actors are obliged to operate is highly pervasive and, as a consequence, members of the organisation had become skilled manipulators of self and information. The interpretations made in this section are discussed to conclude that context and environment constrict leadership and, therefore, comprise important dynamics in the leader follower relationship.

It is suggested that leadership is an essentially contested concept and can be expressed as four possibilities (Grint, 2005b). The first concerns 'who' are leaders, the second 'what' constitutes a leader, the third 'where', and the final possibility, 'how' are things done that make leaders. This section differentiates itself from Grint's position in that the author defines the 'what' as being a consequence of results, but maintains the leader position as held by a human acting in an influence relationship with other individuals. This section gives rise to the possibility that dynamics outside of the human leader follower relationship heavily influence the timbre of the relationship and suggests that the 'what' of leadership may not comprise human agency. This in turn influences how other parts of the leadership phenomenon are interpreted.

Leadership expressed as a dynamic influence process is usually seen as a social influence process between leaders and followers who are conscious human elements of the overall leader follower relationship. From a leader-centric, normative position, leaders influence followers. From a follower-centric position, followers are neither homogenous nor compliant, but may moderate, substitute and construct the leader follower relationship (Jackson & Parry, 2008). An alternative interpretation from a more openly critical viewpoint suggests that individuals in an organisational setting respond to the organisational context, in all its definitional possibilities, in order to play out a relationship moderated by the parameters of the environmental context within which the actors find themselves located.

From a normative perspective, the models derived from its functionalist orthodoxy see leadership as a product of leader agency. From a neo-charismatic platform, leaders influence followers' consciousness by an appeal to a higher ideal or vision, thus transforming followers and the organisation (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Parry & Bryman, 2006). Bryman (1996) has stated that this view of leadership is too closely fixed to an



overtly rational perspective of organisational behaviour and that earlier theoretical antecedents to the neo-charismatic school of leadership have been excluded prematurely. For example, the contingency models of Fiedler (Fiedler, 1967) and the Ohio School of Leadership were ultimately rejected by New Leadership theorists for lacking explanatory power and for being too complex to apply to organisational life. It is the contention here that this study corroborates the complexity of organisational life and that leadership is contingent on the organisational environment; the outstanding point of difference is extent.

It is remarked upon in the previous section that the ABC operates within a legally constrained regulatory framework impacted upon by successive legislation and government reforms as exemplified by the new public management (NPM, see chapter 3.) The clarification or prescription of task is assumed to enhance performance, but is also associated with a commensurate requirement for monitoring performance against stated objectives (Lee et al, 2009). Subsequently, the traditions of local authorities have come under significant pressures as consensual public sector ethos has become exposed to managerialist tendencies drawn from the private sector (Greenaway, 1995). The ABC has developed an extensive bureaucracy and system of internal scrutiny because of reform, legislation and the requirements of public accountability; a bureaucracy that has the capacity at times to exasperate the members of the ABC, whether they be leaders or followers.

*"But the systems we have to work in are absolutely Byzantine... How do you get over those...?"*

A system that is acknowledged as being highly resistant to change and reform,

*"Procedures can be changed but not over any form of longevity,"*

It could be surmised that the central government and its associated apparatus could be seen as playing the role of 'leader' in a relationship with the 'following' ABC. Its engagement with the ABC however must be seen in exclusively transactional terms, as budgetary control remains central government's primary tactic (Lee et al, 2009). Whilst transactional tactics are noted as being important within the leader follower relationship (Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994b), questions must be raised as to the efficacy of relying on a solitary tactic. In the absence of any, or at least no discernible evidence of, transformational behaviours, then it should be concluded that in this context transactionalism does not comprise leadership at all but represents a controlling management; evidence of a conflation of concepts that is a common occurrence in attempts to theorise leadership practice (Rost, 1993).

In studies on public sector leadership, the impact of central government on the leadership of the public body has been recorded. Studies by Blacker (2006) and Van Wart (2003) demonstrate that bureaucratic discretion for leaders in public

sector organisations is diminished, leading to instances where Chief Executives of public bodies can be seen to be mere conduits for centralised policy. It is maintained here that this diminishment of senior managers of public bodies constricts the leadership capacity of organisations and individuals alike. This is of no surprise considered in the light of Weberian analysis that control underpinned by a bureaucratic apparatus gives rise to specific modes of social domination (Morgan, 1997).

The evidence collected shows that the ABC has to maintain and be part of a highly sophisticated system of investigation regarding its compliance with objectives, processes and spending of public money. The system has become so pervasive that the organisation demonstrates high levels of frustration regarding the framework within which it operates but generally complies. Within this arrangement central government, with its transactional treatises, comprises the principal managing/leadership role leaving little scope for managers or elected members to express their own sense of ideas beyond further compliance to a notion of public service being systematically eroded by an ever-encroaching managerialist paradigm.

Despite the rigidity of the bureaucratic apparatus, the possibility of changing the system is rarely seriously entertained. This suggests that in some way the organisation has become complicit in its own levels of scrutiny. Evidence collected indicates that whilst central government imposes a rigid framework of prescriptive tasks, procedural requirements and examination, the ABC has embarked upon a process of bureaucratic embellishment as a product of its own history. Collinson (1999) has suggested that the consensual growth of routinised surveillance and the associated audit culture produces followers who have become skilled exploiters of self and manipulation. In a later study, Collinson (2006) demonstrates that such systems comprising auditing, Human Resource initiatives and technology advances impact on the identity of followers and in cases produce complex forms of anxiety. The relationship between anxieties and manipulation has not been shown but this study concludes that this possibility exhibits, as some members of the ABC have demonstrated, clear skill in manipulating systems and processes to attain goals, and others exhibit anxiety through a slavish adherence to policy and procedure. It is highly improbable that an individual member of the ABC would be entrenched in such binary opposites as complying and manipulating.

It has been demonstrated that a failure in public sector can be career ending; as an example, the case of Sharon Shoesmith, Director of Children's Services of Haringey Council, who was summarily dismissed by the Children's Minister after a failing within her own department. Examples of this kind reinforce the organisational status quo and the systems of investigation, which the ABC are not only complicit in

but have also served to embellish. The organisation is forced to accept the leadership position of central government and, subsequently, adopts a follower posture with the commensurate maelstrom of anxieties, identities and manipulations. It is for these two reasons the leadership capacity of the organisation is thus constrained. In considering the dynamic of the leader follower relationship of those contained within the organisation, an obvious conclusion to make is that leaders and followers are influenced by the leadership of the central government and as such are required to meet the expectation of that relationship. The principal dynamic here, therefore, is the environment within which leaders and followers are located. As a fundamental consequence whatever occurs within the leader follower relationship is not leadership, at least as it is theorised in normative terms, as the associated bureaucratic apparatus renders this virtually impossible.

## **Chapter 7 - illustration 3:**

*“... and we’d have the discussion and say “yeah” and nothing would happen, and then six months later we’d have the same discussion.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executives Unit**

### **7.1 The corporate leadership team**

This illustration is focused on part of an observed meeting of the corporate leadership team (CLT). The illustration deals with issues related to management style and governance on the one hand and, more specifically, with the management of potentially difficult situations.

The interpretations made in the subsequent section deal with concerns related to leadership as good management. It suggests, however, that there are additional considerations to be made by leaders in managing potential situations of conflict. The section concludes by establishing leadership, as practiced, as an almost exclusively transactional relationship within which leaders use access to resources as their primary contingent reward. It is asserted that the acquisition and utilisation of resources is a primary dynamic in leader follower relations.

#### **7.1.1 Background**

The CLT meeting is the principal executive meeting of the officers of the ABC. Its membership is comprised of the most senior officers of the council including the Chief Executive and the four strategic Directors from the principal service functions (City Development, Children's Services, Housing and Neighbourhoods, and Adult Social Services). Included also are senior officers of the associated arm's length organisations (Education, Health) and additional officers from the Chief Executive's Department, including Deputy and Assistant Chief Executives, Council Legal Services and officers from the central services department (Finance and HR). Its total membership is eleven when all are present. In practice, the formal membership rarely meets in its entirety, as others drawn from within their own departments may frequently represent one of the members. Elected members are not represented on this committee.

In recent months, the committee had deliberately chosen to rename itself from the previous title of corporate management team (CMT) to CLT. The change in name was seen as an integral part of an organisational restructuring undertaken during the previous 12 months. The rationale behind the restructuring was the belief that the organisation had become too focused on operational detail and therefore was deficient in its concerns for the wider strategic issues affecting the ABC. Central to the restructuring was an associated shift in emphasis and job role for the newly created Directorates. Directors were now required to be more strategically focused, in which the new Labour policy of following a 'third way' between markets and hierarchies, referred to as "strategic

commissioning”, would be the principal modus operandi alongside delegating operational responsibility to the relevant chief officer. It was felt that the new Director appointments should be engaged in a strategic leadership role. Previously the Directorates were made up of a number of service specific departments administered by a responsible Director. These had now been absorbed into the new Directorate structure, and traditional service functions such as Leisure and Sport had ceased to exist.

The restructuring was provoked by the implementation of legislation from central government, requiring local authorities to create a service department that dealt specifically with the wide range of activities and services related to young people - Children’s Services. Consequently, some of the old service departments were now incorporated into the new Children’s Service Directorate leaving behind a reduced service function that no longer warranted Director administration. In some cases, social services for example, the old existing department was split, with the functions that related to young people being moved to Children’s Services and the remaining components either being incorporated into other departments or, as in the case of the ABC, forming their own administrative unit. The creation of the Children’s Services department, as in the case of other authorities across the UK, led to widespread restructuring of the whole organisation in order to fulfil the legislative requirement of a centrally created reform initiative.

As an internal demonstration of the commitment to the policy of strategic commissioning, and an elevation of leadership skills over administrative competence, the Corporate Management Team was renamed and became the corporate leadership team (CLT). Additionally, the Authority had designed and implemented initiatives to spread leadership throughout the organisation. The most recent was the ‘From Good to Great’ initiative described as,

*“Our leadership challenge, ‘**From Good to Great**’... This sets out the behaviours and culture we are aspiring to create and covers both Council and partner representatives recognising the need to respond to the challenge of leadership across the city.”*

**Council Business Plan, (2008 p.11)**

It was envisaged that the newly constituted CLT would demonstrate its own collective leadership skills and send out a significant signal throughout the rest of the authority concerning the change in emphasis in the style of management of the ABC.

*“I was taking a number of presentations that basically said, “Do you realise that this is how we are viewed? Do you realise that the view within the city is that the city council lacks effective leadership?”...We have an opportunity to effectively address this and we should take the opportunity to address it. It was hard work actually because for eight months we went forward two steps to go backward three steps, We had to change the mindset of those*

*individuals on the CLT who were in a very different place and couldn't quite grasp the concept of what we were trying to take forward."*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executives Unit**

In leading up to the re-configured ABC its members had engaged in 'away-day' awareness and team building activities at which issues related to the production of the ABC strategic vision were discussed and high-level strategy finalised. As the quote above demonstrates the most senior officers were committed to the changes designed for the ABC and were, outwardly at least, engaged and supportive.

**7.1.2 Leader voices**

The process of change within the ABC had clearly been provoked by the requirements of central government. Issues related to strategic commissioning and the development of Children's Services as a response to a perceived lack of national focus, as evidenced by the misfortune of the Victoria Klimbie affair, whilst heavily pertinent must be appreciated as another in a long line of Government endorsed reform initiatives aimed at the public sector. Despite the pervasive view that the public sector does not embrace change, as shown by leader articles in the UK's national newspapers (Toynbee, 2009), the ABC more generally perceived change, reinforced by central government reform and intervention as a constant imperative.

*"One of the key agendas has been about change, In Children's Services it is the biggest and the deepest... it's a cross cutting theme that may not be explicit but it is implicit... but here it's largely driven by the Children's Act... it's due to Government agendas that have come in and start to challenge areas of work for people that have been internally focused to their service."*

**Chief Officer Penk, Children's Services**

*"All about change – change initiatives"*

**Chief Officer Soar, City Development**

*"The speed at which we have to be more flexible and to change quickly... because of all the different types of proposals from government or changes in government or initiatives they want to use to change local government, whether it's efficiency savings, introducing legislation which affects us like transport plan or whether it's giving us new responsibilities that will affect us..."*

**Chief Officer Welland, Housing & Neighbourhoods**

The ABC acknowledges that the motivations and provocations for change are principally external but there would also, at least on the surface, appear to be an acceptance of the need and potential value for more change, motivated by the desire to deliver enhanced levels of service throughout the City. As with many organisations that embark upon an

explicit and deliberate programme of change, the journey within the ABC has not always been straightforward. This would appear to be equally applicable to the CLT which, despite its position as the most senior executive committee of the authority, has also experienced problems related to the change journey, despite being, ostensibly at least, committed to demonstrating change within the organisation.

*“ ... it got to the stage that the same things were coming up, we’d have a discussion and it would be, “Right, what’s wrong with the organisation?” and we’d be good at saying we don’t have enough time, we spend too much time on detailed operation, that a lot of politicians don’t take difficult decisions, that we don’t spend a lot of time determining what our priorities for the city ought to be... and we’d have the discussion and say ‘yeah’ and nothing would happen, and then six months later we’d have the same discussion.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executives Unit**

Whilst this should not be seen as unusual, as the dynamics and difficulties of organisational change is well-documented (Greenwood & Hinings, 2006), it might be that problems related to change were heightened due to a number of unanswered questions related to process and outcomes of the journey.

The introduction of a Children’s Services department has had wide ranging impact upon the ABC, not only structurally but also in terms of the method of working. Aspects related to the conduct of work within the organisation are covered in later sections of this chapter. At this stage, however, it is pertinent to deal with aspects of change related to structure, where the remodelling and redefining of the scope of the CLT is the initiation point.

The complete appointment of the Director team was relatively current, being finalised within the last 6 months. Following the appointment of Directors, further structural reviews were ongoing, leading to the appointment and reassignment of more chief officers. The scope of the organisational review and the potential implications of the structural changes were not fully appreciated until a chance meeting with a senior officer in the Chief Executive Unit who mentioned that the,

*“Council change programme...pretty much everybody will be re-interviewed for their jobs... “*

**Director, Finance and Central Services**

This was later confirmed in a meeting with the Director of Strategic Human Resource Development. Similarly, it was also confirmed that the process of change that the organisation was undertaking was due to become more formalised and wider ranging within a very short time frame.

*“...we have got proposals now to better join those things up and so I am going to chair what has been called the Business Transformation Board.”*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive’s Unit**

### **7.1.3 Follower voices**

In the interest of following a leadership story represented by this particular illustration, and the desire to give credence to multiple voices, it was decided to explore an agenda item related to ‘Diversity and Equality’ by giving those responsible for the presentation of the item an opportunity to supply their interpretation of the events. In this situation, it is reasonable to perceive the officers who delivered the presentation of the paper to the CLT as followers to the CLT leaders. During the course of interviews, the following insights were captured.<sup>5</sup>

In the first instance, it became clear that the officer’s job role was clouded in ambiguity. Despite legal requirements and central government policies in support of Equality and Diversity, the internal audiences were not always as receptive as perhaps expected.

*“Yes, so you tailor what you provide them with stuff that’s relevant, that they can buy into it much easier... if I went along to the members, because the law requires us to do it, at least half of the council will switch off, maybe another quarter will be like, you are not telling us what to do, and then the other quarter may well be asleep. Who knows? Because it is not an issue for them, they don’t deal with it. There are certain politicians I would not go to talk about sexual orientation but what I do is I talk about age. It is just finding that balance and linking the commonalities of one agenda with another agenda and knowing what they are signed up to.”*

The final part of this statement suggests that the task in hand requires significant levels of judgement in order to maintain a train of progress and that continued persuasive effort is required in order to deliver on targets established by central government. The role of the CLT in terms of its capacity to accelerate the legitimacy of the equality and diversity agenda as the executive committee of the ABC is compromised, as both Officers had a rather ambivalent attitude toward the CLT typified by the following comment.

*“...(my line manager) tells me afterwards that CLT respects people like me and you can challenge them. But actually I am not going to sit at CLT and challenge them, make enemies of the people I need to support me to do my job.”*

Whilst it may be explicitly stated that CLT requires Officers to contribute, present and

---

<sup>5</sup> In order to maintain the confidentiality of the respective officers in this section the comments will remain anonymous. The respondents were above Service Manager level.



maintain a position, the reality of doing so, at least in the eyes of the subordinate manager, is fraught with potential risk. Each paper that is brought to the CLT requires that the sponsoring Director of the Directorate from which the document originated, signs it off.

*“Generally I know what happens when I go to CLT... he (line manager) doesn’t even say anything... (He) actually asked me afterwards, “was that OK did I support you enough?” and that is the first time he has ever asked me that.”*

This gives rise to the potential that the sponsoring Director may not feel compelled to support the paper and challenge opposition to the initiative, despite it being well intentioned or otherwise. This suggests that other factors are at play in terms of the discussions related to the agenda item under scrutiny.

*“What I witnessed was political jockeying, a power struggle going on around the table ... between the (Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods) and the (Assistant Chief Executive), historically, there has been some tension between (them)...”*

Attention turned to whether the officers had felt that any progress had been made, as from an outsider perspective ‘progress’, as such appeared to be limited; nevertheless the Officers were able to point to positives,

*“I came out, and the word I used was disappointed because I suppose I didn’t get the decision that I wanted but I was happy we had a discussion on it ... (we) came away and had a coffee and debrief and the outcome of it was yes it was frustrating but at least we had a positive discussion on it. We are starting to raise the profile more...”*

Additionally it was considered whether the remarks made by the Chief Executive had coloured the debate, and it became apparent that it had,

*“I think as soon as (Chief Executive) set that scene (“I worry about this. Is it right? Is it the right direction for us to go?”) I just knew which way the conversation was going. So that set the scene, didn’t it, for what went rapidly downhill (laughing)?”*

Moreover, in the view of at least one of the Officers, this was to be expected,

*“I have been to CLT once where they have come to a decision. You know there was no decision made. There was sort of a decision.”*

Furthermore when discussing the potential paper that was to be redrafted and brought to the CLT at a later date, as stipulated in the minutes of the meeting (see below), it became apparent that despite the debate and the minutes, that ambiguity was still contained within the specified task. The officers expressed little confidence that the path or actions related

to their initiative would be agreed regardless of completing the directed task, as the following dialogue illustrates,

*Officer - On the day it could go through, you're right, or it could be that same old protracted discussion. You know I can't predict it. I really can't predict it.*

*Researcher - Would you feel more confident about the outcome?*

*Officer - No.*

*Researcher - Honestly*

*Officer – Yes, honestly!*

The conversation widened to accommodate the interviewees' experiences of reporting to the CLT,

*"I don't think I should be going to CLT about changes on grammar or the way paragraphs are written. "Did you not notice that that paragraph doesn't make sense?" Fine. But actually, that's not what you are here to tell me, you are here to tell me that you think that is right and appropriate for the way you think the organisation is going. Not actually that that paragraph doesn't make sense, can you re-write it."*

And in summation of their experiences at the CLT meeting attended, one Officer countered,

*"There is about £2.5m of salary in that room - was that £2.5m worth of leadership?"*

## 7.2 The illustration

Reproduced below are the notes that relate to the agenda item extracted from the meeting minutes circulated to the members of the CLT.

### ***“Equality, Diversity and Cohesion – a way forward.***

*Officer A outlined the purpose of the report which was to return to CLT offering proposals for a single Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion strategy. It was felt that these two areas are distinct but linked and the legal obligations and additional drivers such as the Equalities Review, single Equality Bill, single Commission for Equality and Human Rights, and the proposals from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion were outlined. It was noted that indicators on cohesion will be built into the LAA and will form a key focus for the corporate assessment. In view of the above, it was proposed that a single Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion strategy is adopted by the council.*

*There was a discussion about the proposal and concerns were expressed that the challenges were different for each area and that a single strategy may prevent a strong focus remaining on key aspects of community cohesion. The ‘value-added’ nature of a single strategy was also questioned.*

*It was felt that there needed to be a clearer articulation of the cohesion challenges and actions to address them, both within the new City Strategic Plan and LAA objectives, and at a local level. It was felt a single strategic approach may be useful although it would be possible to adopt different implementation approaches in different service areas, where necessary.*

*It was agreed that there should be further consideration of the proposal to adopt a single strategy but that both strategies should be reviewed and linked together. Included in the review should be the proposals from Director Housing and Neighbourhoods and Assistant Chief Executive regarding respective leadership roles and responsibilities.”*

### **CLT Meeting Minutes, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007.**

The CLT meeting took part in a room at the very top of the Civic Centre, with staggering views of the changing landscape of the city centre. A joke was made regarding the number of tower cranes that were in view and that the city had more cranes involved in active development than a perceived more successful “competitor” city. Numbers of cranes and the associated developments were all easily recalled and remarked upon as an indication of the wealth and success of the city - this image of success didn’t really tally with the environment that the meeting was to take place in. There should be little doubt that grandiose displays of success equated with the allocation of council funds and would not sit well with the ABC. Later it was observed that, during the time spent within

the ABC, principles of public accountability, prudent use of public money and the search for 'value for money' options became topics that were habitually interwoven into the topics of conversation and item under consideration. Nevertheless, the room was so ordinary, it could have been anywhere, and was completely out of kilter with the success, wealth and affluence of the city itself. There were no outward displays of identity, corporate colours, icons of the organisations, nothing of its people and even less of its plans and aspirations. It was noted that some of the Venetian blinds were not working; one had come loose from its mount. In one corner a computer and lectern stood and appeared to have been disembowelled as its electronic guts spilled out over the floor in front of it like miles and miles of electronic spaghetti. The room was dominated by a very large clock, which after three hours of meeting and discussion seemed to tick by more slowly.

Prior to the meeting, papers had been circulated, attached to the corresponding agenda items, built up into a large pack also containing the minutes from the previous meeting. As the meetings were held weekly the amount of work that had gone into this meeting was clearly evident. Even more obvious, however, was the effort required on behalf of the participants to keep abreast of the issues at hand and, even more, to be cognisant of the detail that the issues inevitably contained. It was striking that the previous meeting had managed to produce a comparatively short set of minutes, of only five pages. The papers submitted were all noticeably similar, in terms of format, to each other. The front page provided a brief summary as to why the papers had been brought with additional supporting material. The front page however contained no conclusion, but only the outline of options available for consideration. The papers were all signed by the author and by the sponsoring member of the CLT, without which a paper could not be brought forward for consideration. The agenda comprised eight specific items, and comments had been made so as to avoid any doubt that the proceedings of the meeting were likely to be 'a chore'.

It was noted in this meeting and other meetings attended how deferent the committee body was to the formal chair of the meeting. This was more than a gentle complaisance to the position of the chair as the most senior officer present. As the meeting unfolded, the role of the chair and their position as senior officer present was critical to the progress of the meeting and the formalities that underpinned it; as a counterpoint to this, however, was the informal nature of the meeting itself. The Chief Executive after only a couple of minutes, possibly as a gesture representative of the task at hand removed his tie and opened his collar, other members took off their jackets and placed them over their chairs. Other members of the meeting continued to have a light lunch, collect coffee and water or left the room as they saw fit. There was however a formal cordiality to which each member subscribed, frequent checking of the phone would occur, but no one left to take a call and only very occasionally replied to texts from the correspondent on the other end.

One of the Items on the agenda required a paper to be presented by the Diversity and Equality team regarding (learnt after the fact) the merging of issues of equality diversity and community cohesion into a singular strategy for the city. A long and rather detailed presentation was given, during which time the sponsoring Director appeared distant, engaged in the papers in front of him and occasionally doodling on a scrap piece of paper, but rarely acknowledging either the speakers or the points made. The presentation, although well accomplished, was difficult to comprehend fully. The language and jargon utilised, coupled with the nature of the issues involved, meant that the overall impression of the presentation was one of crushing complexity. This impression was not, however, limited to this particular item but was applicable to many of the items on the meeting agenda. All the items followed a rather formulaic path of introduction, presentation, questioning, debate and conclusion; all packed into a very particular form of language that appeared to be appropriate for the audience only. It resonated heavily with jargon and acronyms, references to legislature and other organisations, and was primarily concerned with issues that may be described as “*wicked problems*” (Grint, 2000) - intractable issues that have no easily considered or operational solution.

Following the presentation the meeting fell quiet and turned to the Chief Executive who, not only introduced each item, would also initiate the debate. In practice what this meant was that the Chief Executive set the parameters within which the debate could operate. Not all of his opening statements were recorded but his initial statement for the Diversity and Equality item was “*I worry about this. Is it right? Is it the right direction for us to go?*” thus effectively closing off any open debate about the real concerns of the paper and the issues involved. Despite this, however, the ‘debate’ continued for the next hour and a quarter in which the three main proponents were the Chief Executive, the sponsor of the paper and the Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, with some nominal contribution from one or two others present. It appeared that, although the principal proponents were treading very carefully, the Chief Executive was acting as referee to a very public, yet politically motivated, verbal boxing match between the other two officers. The closing decision regarding this opening issue was that another paper dealing with the issues would be brought back to the CLT after further consideration by the Officers of the Equality and Diversity Team.

The two officers who had presented the paper appeared a little deflated as they left and the two senior officers around whom the debate had been conducted looked nonplussed. The remaining members of the group looked relieved; a palpable sense of tension had been dissipated with the closing of this particular debate.

### 7.3 Acquisition and utilisation of resources

In the previous chapter, evidence was interpreted to suggest that the central government, due to the rigour of its auditing framework, had effectively occupied the leader position in a leader follower relationship with the ABC. It was concluded that the ABC had contributed to the pervasive nature of the environment, which in turn had constricted the leadership capacity of the organisation itself.

The interpretations made here conclude that the transactional and constricted nature of leadership impacts upon the interactions of agents within the ABC. The control and making available of resources are principal tactics in maintaining the position of leader in the organisation. The availability of resources becomes the focus of negotiating leadership and, therefore, comprises a significant dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

The illustration in this chapter demonstrates the transactional qualities of the Chief Executive in instigating and chairing the debate related to diversity and equality within the city and the ABC. This could be seen as evidence of a conflation between leadership and effective management (Rost, 1993), although those that presented the agenda item did not interpret the actions of the wider group as being leadership.

*“There is about £2.5m of salary in that room - was that £2.5m worth of leadership?”*

During the fieldwork the researcher attended numerous meetings and not only recorded that they were similar in format and operation but also that it was very cognisant that members of the meeting group deferred to the chair of the meeting who was usually the most senior officer present. In meetings when both officers and elected members were present, the officers in the meeting still deferred to the most senior officer in the room regardless whether he/she was attending or chairing. Within the officer population of the ABC there is a very clear appreciation of position and status derived from location in the organisation structure. A rigorous formal structure, as evidenced by title and grades, which relate directly to banding of pay, requires commensurate levels of formalised process and procedure in order to make operation possible. The operation of the bureaucracy coalesces with the organisation structure via the instrument of delegated levels of authority, which cascade through the organisation chart to the incumbent post holder.

It may be possible to assert that the examples of government and the Chief Executive in relying upon a conflation of good management and transactional leadership, ostensibly to get things done, is an example of practice that is replicated throughout the organisation. In other chapters the dominance of technical knowledge over other forms of skill (see chapter 8) is noted and whilst the possession of excellent technical awareness should not be taken as a weakness, a

lack of general management/appreciation has the capacity to impact detrimentally on the relationship between leader and followers (Dansereau, 1995).

Furthermore, it is those with a perceived good technical grasp of an area of service that get noticed and promoted, which is the ultimate contingent reward as part of a leadership transaction. It is the conclusion of this study that an overtly transactional or technical professional approach impinges upon the leader follower relationship. Leaders attain a level of authority as a consequence of their position in the structure, augmented by a perceived technical competence in an area of service provision; a combination of personal and position power (Bass, 1960). These constructs theoretically interact over many different levels making it very difficult to distinguish between the two (Yukl, 2002). There is evidence however that both power bases are utilised within the ABC and it is the contention of this study that a product of the two generates significant access to resources.

The issue of power within leadership studies is yet another hotly contested area. Within the literature review provided in chapter 2 the word 'power' is more prevalent within the chapter than any other conceptual variable of leadership. To many, the absence of power is the true test of leadership, in that leadership can only be expressed when influence is exerted from a non-coercive platform (Rost, 1993). Without wanting to engage in the definitional debates ongoing within leadership studies, Rost's position seems to be one of the very few conceptual definitions where leadership is differentiated away from management (recognising of course that a definition of management itself presents some difficulty). Regardless of the elegance of Rost's definition, there remains a problem attributing any influence to non-coercive factors when there is a strong evidence of hierarchy combined with commensurate levels of positional and personal power. Again, it must be concluded that whatever is going on between leaders and followers, within the ABC, it is not leadership as understood in a normative guise.

The preceding paragraphs in this section have been concerned with the observation of status and position through which the individual may be attributed title of leader. The activities and behaviours of the leaders are not leadership as is understood in normative terms due to the absence of any transformational appeal to followers. Despite this, however, it should not be assumed that the activities and behaviours of the ABC's leaders comprise bad leadership. In the illustration accompanying this chapter the Chief Executive can be accused of establishing the parameters of the debate. This is only one interpretation of the illustration. A second alternative interpretation is that the Chief Executive deliberately planned and set out to establish the parameters of a conversation knowing full well that the ensuing debates could be detrimental to one of two members of the CLT. The Chief Executive skilfully manipulated the conversation to conclude that the two proponents sat at the meeting table should collaborate to produce a further document that was more of a compromise between the two individuals. Whilst the

officers who had presented the paper felt disappointed with the outcome, their initiative had not been dismissed and they had indicated they were pleased with the level of debate that had occurred during the meeting.

Whilst it is the contention of this study that issues of power are a contributor to the style of leadership/management employed in the maintenance of status within the hierarchy; questions are raised as to how this use of power impacts upon followers. In an earlier chapter, it was noted that followers had rejected the notion of following but had an appreciation of the value of leadership. Furthermore it was also noted that fixing the role of leaders and followers is fraught with ambiguity, principally because the roles are interchangeable and that, for the majority of time, individuals acted from a platform of following as opposed to leading. The designated leaders of the organisation are capable of maintaining their position within the structure when they adopt the posture of leaders, however, because of the changeable nature of their position, they are equally adept at maintaining their position within the structure when operating as followers. Adherence to process and protocol, reporting all possible alternative courses of action, collaboration, dissemination of 'relevant' information and timing are all tactics that are utilised in order to maintain position. It is not suggested that leaders/followers will engage in position maintenance exclusively and to the detriment of other causes. The public sector ethos requires that other operational or legislative issues will take precedence and maintenance is not, therefore, the only objective, merely an important one.

Furthermore it is suggested here that this study provides evidence which concludes that subordinate officers operating in a following mode are able to engage in similar tactics as outlined above, not only to maintain their position within the authority but also to grow their position. This requires moving up and through the organisation structure. Followers require leaders because they hold the access to resources. Leaders and followers engage in a meaningful transactional relationship concerning progression and maintenance through the availability of resources. In the absence of any transactional negotiation concerning resource availability and allocation, followers will seek allegiances with leaders who have and are prepared to make resources available. Followers, of course, are also a resource and are subsequently valuable to leaders but more so is their ability to acquire additional resources. The debates within the CLT can be interpreted as a public display of bargaining and negotiation regarding the acquisition of resources. Issues of equality and diversity have heightened value within central government circles and, as a consequence, attract significant levels of resources from numerous sources. The Chief Executive is ensuring that the ownership of resources is shared out, possibly to ensure that no one acquires too many resources and tilts the position of power and authority, and that the benefits of resources are felt across a wider platform. It should also be noted that resources might be defined to include political currency held by the individual. To lose out during public bargaining would be very



detrimental to the political currency of the individual – a factor that the Chief Executive would appreciate. The principal dynamic in the leader follower relationship here, therefore, is resources, and most notably the availability, utilisation and acquisition of resources.

## Chapter 8 - illustration 4

*“Every 6 months they’ve been told they’re doing fine, so the organisation has developed a theory, and it’s always had it – at least since I’ve been here – that you deal with people who are not performing with restructuring.”*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

### 8.1 Accountable and responsible

The previous three chapters have dealt with empirical materials and made interpretations, primarily from a leader perspective, to make conclusions concerning the dynamics between leaders and followers. The ensuing three chapters continue this approach but shift the emphasis to demonstrate the role of followers in the relationship.

This illustration is not a true observation as such but is a composite of bits of observations assembled to make an important illustration. It concerns an organisation initiative designed to uncover the accountabilities and responsibilities of the chief officer job role. The followers in the illustration perceive the motives behind the initiative differently; subsequently, it is deemed to lack transactional benefit and could be detrimental to chief officers. The illustration outlines the followers’ response(s) to the initiative.

This chapter establishes the importance of followers in the leader follower relationship. Interpretations related to this illustration conclude that the relationship is reciprocal and establishes a complex dynamic, termed here as symbiosis, as an important dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

#### 8.1.1 Background

The organisation had sought to clarify and explore matters related to management responsibility and accountability and had contracted a nationally known consulting firm that specialised in human resource issues, Human Resource Consultancy (HRC) to assist in this work. The consultancy had drawn up a matrix (referred to internally as RACI – Responsibility, Accountability, Communication, Information) pertaining to each Directorate. The matrix laid out in tabular form the task/job description in the extreme left hand column on a sheet of A3 paper and listed each chief officer across the top. The intention was that chief officers should indicate on the table whether they were accountable or responsible for a particular job role/task; to make the process more complex there were degrees of accountability and responsibility dependent upon ones individual or collective contribution. Furthermore, the definitions of ‘accountability’ and ‘responsibility’ were general descriptions, giving rise to interpretive flexibility and allowing the various managerial teams the opportunity to embellish or redefine the concepts to fit their own particular environments. Some matrices ran over more than one sheet of paper depending upon the particular Directorate team.

What became very apparent with this particular illustration was that, despite attempts to locate responsibility for the development of this initiative, the individual, department and the rationale behind the RACI matrix remained elusive. During the course of the 'From Good to Great' event the two most senior officers of the Human Resources Department introduced the consultant from HRC to the researcher with the explanation that the consulting firm were doing some work for the ABC. It was only at a later date that it became apparent that the RACI matrix was the work for which the HRC had been commissioned. During interviews with the HR officers RACI was very rarely mentioned and the outcome of the work was never made transparent and, consequently, its intent was never fully appreciated.

The RACI matrix was one of a number of substantive people-related initiatives that were taking place within the organisation during the time that the empirical material was collected. As well as the RACI initiative there were also the 'From Good to Great' initiative and a culture audit based on the 'cultural web' model of Johnson and Scholes (Johnson & Scholes, 1999) designed to complement the 'One Council' strategy; both of which are conjoined and justified as developing continuous organisational improvement. The Chief Executive explained some of the rationale for initiatives.

*"If it isn't delivering... demonstrable improvement to the punter: the fact that people are happier being here isn't sufficient."*

**Chief Executive, ABC**

#### **8.1.2 Leader voices**

The apparent relationship between the HRC and the senior officers of the HR department witnessed at the 'From Good to Great' event at least demonstrates an association, even though the association became less and less apparent as the fieldwork progressed. From a chronological perspective the HR – HRC relationship was witnessed at the outset of the fieldwork conducted as part of this study. Over time this became less and less apparent as the incidence of reference to RACI became less and less. Furthermore, in management team meetings when RACI was referred to, it was clear that managers associated RACI with the consulting firm and not with the HR department. It appeared that HR specifically took action to distance them from the RACI project. Whilst this is a possibility, it will remain an issue of conjecture, but other 'distancing' actions by HR were observed elsewhere, primarily in writing a paper for the CLT that presented the involvement of the ICC and 'From Good to Great' in particularly poor light.

The organisation formally placed significant emphasis on appraisal, and formal performance appraisals were undertaken throughout the ABC on an annual basis. The appraisal pack sent to the appraisee is formidable, growing in volume at every step in the hierarchy until Directors and chief officers receive an appraisal pack which is the size of a lever arch file, comprising in excess of 150 A4 pages. The contents and the pages started

with guidance on conducting appraisals for both appraiser and appraisee. This was followed by an 'elements of performance' assessment and then the 'accountability portfolio', which comprised a series of corporate reports, including 'sustainable communities' and 'transport', 'resident survey', 'equality, diversity, cohesion and integration', 'HR governance report', 'RACI', 'ethnic minority group', 'women's group', 'governance indicators' and, finally, a job description.

The importance of the annual appraisal was often stated and yet the observable utility of the appraisal appears to suggest that statements of value concerning appraisal were more rhetorical than actual. The appraisal document originated in the HR department and, when asked about the format of the appraisal, the officer who compiled the report said he did so because they had been instructed to do so. Senior officers of the department corroborated this view.

*"The Deputy Chief Executive wanted everything included so we just bunched everything together."*

**Head of Strategic Human Resources, Central Services**

This statement could be considered indicative of the way the organisation perceives its own appraisal system. Certainly, the following statements appear to support this perception. In conversation with one of the Directors (whose anonymity has been protected) about appraisals in a very busy office, in which cascades of paper were pushed up against a far wall, the Director drew my attention to appraisal documents by stating,

*"There's last year's you see. Oh! And the year before's."*

Later during the conversation, the Director highlighted a continued frustration with appraisals and, more specifically, the way in which they were implemented through their department. Again, this appears to be an organisational frustration as the Human Resources department made a similar point.

*"So you're going to discipline someone...did you address this, have you mentioned it in the appraisals, and you find nothing has happened. Then actually what they have done is not give themselves the tools to deal with the issue..."*

**Head of Strategic Human Resources, Central Services**

Generally, the Directors voiced a level of dissatisfaction with appraisals and the apparent lack of honesty in making assessments about an individual's capacity to do their job. Furthermore, this appears to be reflected in the way the Directors' own appraisals are conducted.

*"So we went through the process bit and then that was it...no talk about what I've done in the job",*

*"We are really focused on the processes technical and administrative, we manage budgets brilliantly...where we fall down is this caring more about this, (the appraisal document) as opposed to them..."*

**Director Trent, City Development**

Appraisal interviews, therefore, seemingly focus on those elements related to compliance, as opposed to the job role and tasks associated with the job role. Subsequently, it would appear that senior managers, to some extent at least, have questioned their suitability and validity.

### **8.1.3 Follower voices**

Whilst the most senior of officers appear to be aware of a shortfall in the administration of appraisals from an appraiser perspective, the question remains as to how appraisals are perceived from an appraisee (follower) perspective, recognising that the vast number of people contained in the population makes any consensus of opinion difficult. One interview with an officer in the Chief Executive's Unit touched upon work levels, and comments were made regarding appraisals, which confirms the view that formal support for the appraisal process may be relegated in the light of other more pressing work priorities.

*"The appraisals are always put back, postponed; I probably have an appraisal every 18 months rather than annually."*

**Senior Officer, Chief Executives Unit.**

Furthermore, meetings between the manager and subordinate were seemingly given less consideration than other duties undertaken during the course of a typical day within the ABC,

*"I had to insist actually at my last appraisal, 'it's not fair, you cancelled my one-to-one', and I don't get to see you."*

And,

*"...when we have scheduled one-to-ones I don't waste his time; a scheduled one-hour meeting might last 10 minutes!"*

**Senior Officer, Chief Executives Unit**

More generally, the views expressed concerning meetings with managers contained much paradox. From an official point of view, the meeting between manager and subordinate is critical in the management of performance, although in practice the formal methodology lacked veracity, particularly at the most senior levels of the hierarchy. From a follower perspective, meetings with managers were formulaic, in which the time of the manager was protected, and were more generally seen as opportunities to promote oneself by suggesting that there were no problems to be concerned about. A manifest openness regarding difficult or ambiguous areas of a job role, specifically when relating to the jobholder's technical competence, was not entered into freely as it could be

construed as weakness. The relationship between manager and subordinate was deliberately conducted and maintained from a healthy, but respectful, distance.

During the course of the observations it was noticeable how little engagement of a personal, social or humanistic nature occurred. Small attempts at breaking routine; introductions of levity, snippets of conversation concerning the football results, made up the sum total of evidence that the population under observation were in some sense a group together, engaging collectively and sharing – working toward a common outcome.

The ABC, as alluded to in the next comment below, is an organisation that is driven to technical delivery of services to a public, but there should be little doubt of the commitment and sense of vocation of the vast majority of people working within the ABC.

*“General management is not valued, technical skills are valued and people play up to that...”*

**Head of Strategic Human Resources, Central Services**

*“...there are lots of people that are really enthusiastic about what they do, and they’re often at the lower levels... they really care about what they are doing.”*

**Director Trent, City Development**

*“You would think they would be completely distanced from the council, they have got very particular jobs, particularly community care; most of them work part time, perhaps only six hours a week, but the pride they take in their work is fantastic...It has nothing to do with the centre, I think it’s more to do with the ethos of those services...”*

**Senior Officer, Chief Executive Unit**

It could be argued, however, that the commitment given to a public and, in some cases, a very demanding public at that, have supplanted any need for a social perspective internally. In some cases, the fact that people are dealing with another human being, possibly one at risk, may be lost in the conduct of delivering services.

*“We’re still keeping the 55% reduction target but you now have to deliver it in three years. So what we’re saying to government is that, “We hold our hands up. You can rap our knuckles, you can rap the organisation’s knuckles”, and, Teenage conception is an important issue because of the impact it has – and we accept we haven’t done anything about it, and we accept the admonishment we failed in that, but let’s be realistic about what we are going to do going forward.” And there is no way we are going to achieve 55% in three years, we will be lucky if we achieve 25%, so can we please agree a target that makes us focus on it as an issue. And we don’t end up in three years not hitting target and the whole LAA (Local Area Agreement) is*

*considered as failing... are we winning the argument? We weren't at the beginning of the week..."*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive's Unit**

There exists a slight tension between the clients of the service and the intention of the service. In the case above the issue relates to the reduction of teenage conceptions within the city, however, the teenagers for whom the service exists, and the reduction of conceptions, appear to exist outside of the very client base itself. In other words, the objective appears to be established for all the right reasons but seems to lack humanity; a factor acknowledged at senior levels within the ABC.

*"You see that very much in communications, look at a lot of our communication to residents, they're very technical in nature because they are written by very technical people, actually if you understand the subject matter then they're fantastic..."*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive's Unit**

The natural sphere of engagement for the members of the ABC appears to be technically oriented and rarely encroaches on the social and humanistic elements of work and organisation. Internally, as externally, the technical aspects of the job are pre-eminent and the sense of the 'human' gets lost in the sense of the 'resources'. However, this should not be too surprising as the ABC has promoted staff based on technical competence and not on any sense of general management capacity.

*"In the past we have promoted people on their technical skills and not whether they have leadership skills. So what we have is a number of managers who are technically brilliant at what they do, but not managing because they are still doing the old job..."*

**Head of Strategic Human Resources, Central Services**

This could be interpreted as a frailty within the leadership and work relationships more generally. In order that this assertion should at least be corroborated, questions were asked from a rather "tongue in cheek" stance during interview and the interviewee was *provoked* into considering if the ABC was "technically competent, but socially inept". The response was surprising,

*"I think that sums up the challenges we have."*

**Director Trent, City Development**

*"I think that's probably, yeah I think that's probably quite good."*

**Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Executive's Unit**

Leaders do not display or are hesitant to make entreaties through a direct appeal to either the intellect or to the emotions, a hesitancy which is also reciprocated by followers - a dyadic reluctance by the leader and follower to engage on anything outside of the technical or procedural. Questions remain, therefore, as to whether this self-confessed frailty contributes in any way to the following observation,

*“There is a general dissatisfaction working within the centre of ABC (Civic Hall)... yet sickness levels are down at less than two days per person, they turn up every day, they’re really good at what they do, but they don’t really care about the organisation... You have to make a decision that some of those people are not going to change. If they’re coming to work and they’re really good at their job, it doesn’t matter how many away days, how many workshops, how many nice things we say, how many newsletters we send out, how many award ceremonies, how many times you give them a metaphorical and physical hug...they’re still going to go, ‘they don’t care’ because we don’t pay them enough.”*

**Head of Service Admin, Corporate Services.**

Performance appraisal within the ABC is clearly a more complex procedure than the purely formal process, as outlined in formal documents, which stipulates the official expectations of the organisations. The following statement, provided by a long serving chief officer, provides an insight into alternative ways in which the ABC manages the performance of its members.

*“Every 6 months they’ve been told they’re doing fine, so the organisation has developed a theory, and it’s always had it – at least since I’ve been here – that you deal with people who are not performing with restructuring; or you devalue their job to such an extent that they get embarrassed and they walk. And that’s what RACI is about. The game is all about how many Rs and As can you get in your column.”*

*“There will be some sort of reasonable adjustment made, which will filter through into job descriptions and, ultimately, into levels of remuneration – or is there a case for a chief officer at all...”*

*“They won’t kick good people out; somehow you’ll survive.”*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development.**



## 8.2 The illustration

The project was initiated at a team meeting at which members of the team were invited to take a copy of the matrix and fill it in, whereupon the HRC team would collate it. The deadlines for completion had overrun several times and so the matrix was to be brought back to a team meeting for further discussion and clarity. It was understood that the discussion concerning the matrix had already been extensive and, in some cases, had become quite heated. The exposure to other team members' work and interpretation had initiated a continual iterative process of utilising information gained to reclassify one's own work responsibilities and accountabilities in line with their peers.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted. Members of a team ensured that they were not underrepresented on the matrix. A lack of As (Accountabilities) relative to peers may suggest that one had minimum levels of accountability, thus paving the way for questions concerning the current job role and future validity. Furthermore, if members felt that their job role had been poorly represented by the HRC team they took it upon themselves to add aspects of their job role to the left hand column. In time, the job task column came to represent even the minutiae of the various job roles, as members assigned As and Rs to the matrix for the most minor of tasks. Many had arbitrarily based their own accountability and responsibility structure on the fact that if a team member had claimed to be accountable or responsible for a particular task then they must be also. To make the validity of the matrix further questionable each team of people undertaking the exercise approached it in a unique manner making cross comparison difficult.

It had been maintained that the matrix had been used in other organisations, although this was never substantiated. It was clear that the HRC's consultants were taken aback by the response to their work. The level of questioning regarding the complexity of job role and task, further exacerbated by the tactical machinations of those taking part, soon rendered the matrix inoperable and irrelevant. The project was rejected universally eight months after its initiation due to management recalcitrance and lack of relevance. At no point did any Director feel compelled to sit with each of their reports and have a meaningful discussion concerning the responsibilities and accountabilities of each job role. The impression was that with fourteen direct reports the commitment to the project by each Director was outweighed by the likely benefits to be derived from the process. Furthermore, Directors were not able to adequately suggest which criteria chief officers should adopt in order to be more prescriptive in their approach to completing the matrix. What was to happen to the matrix and the subsequent developmental work on completion was never broached, as support quickly dissipated from the project. Again, the impression was that officers were relieved and self-congratulatory in contributing to and witnessing its final demise.

### 8.3 Symbiosis

The position of leader and follower is ambiguous and to suggest that certain dynamics pertain to leaders and not followers, or vice versa, is erroneous. The dynamics uncovered in this study are dynamics of the relationship and not specifically the constituent parts. The dynamics impact on both leaders and followers, possibly in different ways and extents, but they are highly unlikely to be totally absent in the relationship.

The previous section outlined an apparently Human Resource driven initiative referred to internally as RACI. This illustration demonstrates how individuals can read different meaning and intention into initiatives. The chief officers' reaction to RACI firmly establishes followers' independent agency but, furthermore, uncovers the importance that both leaders and followers have to each other. The principal dynamic of the leader follower relationship uncovered during the interpretive process is one of symbiosis.

In the introductory paragraphs to this illustration, it is suggested that the ABC wished to resolve or explore issues related to the responsibility and accountability of the chief officer population. It should be stated here that this, as a rationale for the project, is inferred by the researcher, as at no time did the reason for undertaking such a piece of work become apparent. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that neither the Human Resources department nor the consulting company who devised the project could have envisaged the protracted and complex nature in which the project was approached. This may be due to the following four reasons.

Firstly, the consulting company approached the matter from a purely functional perspective and failed to capture the nuance, complexity and ambiguity of the roles chief officers undertake within the ABC. From a formal perspective, job role descriptions are extensive documents designed to capture the requirements of the job based on a role responsibility and personal specification. From a different perspective the job descriptions are, to an extent, historical documents that fail to capture the pressures that chief officers have to deal with on a day-to-day basis; pressures that may reinforce, deflect and/or conflict with the formal job requirements. From an overtly rational functional basis, the project of tabulating the accountabilities and responsibilities of chief officers was, at best, only going to represent a percentage of what chief officers do whilst working.

Secondly, the ABC was undergoing extensive structural reorganisation as a response to central government's requirement for a Children's Directorate. Following this, the ABC restructured its existing directorates to create a new structure with strategically focused Directors. The second tier of management, chief

officers, was also undergoing structural reorganisation and new reporting lines. This included the creation of new chief officer roles, and chief officers had been appointed from outside the organisation accordingly. Under the new structural arrangements, the new chief officers had been provided with a delegated authority commensurate with the old director position. However, Directors had not completely delegated their authorities but were operating under a 'concurrent delegation' that gave chief officers delegated authority but Directors still retained the right of 'step in' should it be required. Some chief officers, typically those in post for a longer period, had not received these new privileges and were operating a hybrid system of managing day-to-day services without the formal acknowledgement of delegated authority.

Evidence was collected and has been presented here to show that chief officers were not only aware of the duplicity of the chief officer role, but that some resentment and anxiety had been created by the structural reform. It is reasonable to conclude that chief officers approached the RACI project with a degree of caution, as they were very aware that the matrix did not represent their role, and the variance in role meant that there was a huge disparity between accountabilities and responsibilities. Newly configured chief officer positions were able to represent the delegated authorities previously held by Directors. To some extent, therefore, they were being asked to take part in an initiative, the outcome of which was obvious from the start.

The third reason contributing to the outcome of the RACI initiative was the interpretation made by the chief officers of the reasoning behind the project. Although the stated outcomes of the project were not made obvious to the researcher, it is reasonable to assume that some benefit to the organisation would have been derived from seeing the project through to a satisfactory conclusion. It would appear that the chief officer population, however, had arrived at the view that whilst the stated benefit may be attained there were other non-explicit reasons for the introduction of the initiative. The collective experiences of the chief officer group and their associated understanding of the history of the workings of the ABC led them to interpret the initiative as an attempt to inform the restructuring of the chief officer population. From this perspective, the chief officers in cooperating may hasten to serve their own demise and so they made little or no attempt to progress the project, but made successful attempts either to mould the project in beneficial terms or to see it finished without conclusion.

Finally, the RACI project was legitimised with a high degree of formal approval from the HR function and the respective Directors of the departments. In other words, the formal leaders of the Directorates had stated the intention that the project would be undertaken. Nevertheless, somewhere along the journey the path of the project had

become derailed, principally because of the deliberate actions of followers. This however cannot be taken as evidence of weak leadership in any terms. Normative leadership theory stops short of asserting an unquestioned obedience; also there are a number of leader elements that are absent in this instance. There is no appeal to any higher sense of transforming the organisation; there is however a transactional request which was ultimately declined as the rewards were either seen as not valuable enough, or not in the interests of followers. Whilst such appeals are important in neo-charismatic leadership models, contrary to this, the full range leadership theory model predicts that leaders may engage in 'Laissez Faire' behaviours (Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994b). In this example, leaders made few forcible entreaties toward completion of the project and it is safe to conclude that leaders engaged in laissez faire behaviour. The reasons for this, however, are less obvious and will be commented upon later in the section.

Followers are usually appreciated as a homogenous and compliant group (Kellerman, 2008) and normative forms of leadership see leadership as a zero sum game where leader agency can only be achieved at the expense of follower agency (Reicher et al, 2005). However, in this instance followers are acting under their own volition and contrary to the designs of leaders. This strongly indicates that following, as opposed to being a follower, is an essential component of the leader follower relationship and establishes the agency of followers. This finding runs contrary to much of the theorising concerning followers, principally because the relationship with followers is only conceptualised from a basis of leaders influencing followers (Bass, 1985; Hogg, 2001). Even theories that attempt to focus on the activities of followers stop short of indicating that followers can act with independence from leaders. Studies conducted by Collinson are an exception to this as he has demonstrated that follower's identities are more complex, differentiated and change in line with their social environment; followers are capable of responding differently to leadership (Collinson, 1999, 2006).

A different response to that predicted under normative leadership models is often categorised as workplace resistance. However, studies have concluded that an individual's response to leaders need neither be compliance nor resistance but can be what is referred to as 'observance' - a combination of the two giving rise to both positioning and reflexivity (Iedema et al, 2006). It is maintained in this study that the complex and ambiguous nature of being a leader or follower contributes to observance, allowing followers free range to both comply and resist leaders. More than that, however, in cases where the net outcome of an action is perceived to be less than favourable toward the individual or group, followers will engage in behaviours that appear compliant but are wholly resistant. In response leaders may

adopt laissez faire behaviours, as the initiative is neither in the best interest of followers or leaders.

During the course of the RACI project from inception to conclusion there were opportunities for the leaders in this situation to stage interventions to promote more satisfactory progress of the project. During the course of the fieldwork, seemingly ineffectual actions of leaders were observed. This view is clearly a functional reaction to what looks like poor management. Underpinning such laissez faire attitudes, however, must be more complex motivations than at first assumed. The ambiguity of the leader role in the ABC contributes significantly to the apparent lack of forcible actions by a leadership population. All the leaders within the ABC are required to spend considerable time acting from a follower platform. The leader group of the ABC senior managers can comprise a variety of constituents ranging from central government to notions of public sector ethos; from elected members to institutionalised bureaucracy; and from external stakeholder expectations to formalised superordinate managers. The point of stating this is to demonstrate that the position of leader within the ABC is not too far divorced from being a follower. In engaging with followers there are still significant dynamics that impact upon leadership behaviours and the relationship with followers. Leaders are able to empathise with followers due to the proximity of their own position and their understanding that they require followers in order to maintain their position within the organisation. Leaders understood the rhetoric behind the RACI initiative, were not convinced of the value and had experience of the history of the workings of the ABC which gave them shared insights as to the rationale of the project. Hence in maintaining position it becomes more favourable to adopt a laissez faire position as opposed to take a functionally managerial position and inflame the tensions and resentments of the follower group, provided that the follower group seemingly plays its part in the subterfuge.

In this illustration, evidence has been provided concerning the autonomy of follower actions. In an environment such as the ABC, followers, in response to the ambiguity of position, role and task, are capable of reacting in different and surprising ways to leaders. Subsequently, leaders, who are not too far divorced from the position of follower themselves, are able to develop equally skilful and manipulative positions in order to maintain their own position in the group and the wider organisation. Leaders wait to see how the actions of the group play out before deciding upon their own interventions. The principal dynamic involved in the leader follower relationship in this illustration can therefore be appreciated as being a more complex dynamic of symbiosis. Leaders and followers need each other and, due to complex multiple identities and observances, they can at times be the same thing.

## Chapter 9 - Illustration 5

*"I've just decided that I'm stuffed anyway so what the heck... There are a lot of bullish people in the ABC and he who shouts loudest does get to do what he wants. He did get to move his section and form PPPU because he made life too difficult for managers in other areas and I know that for a fact."*

**Chief Officer Soar, ADS**

### 9.1 A management meeting

The illustration contained within this section is concerned with a Directors' Team meeting that was observed during the fieldwork. The illustration highlights that formal activities do not always give credence to the perceptions of a group. From a functional perspective, the group debates the future of a particular business activity. Further unveiling of the illustration shows that the functional aspects of the illustration could have occluded the political nature of the backdrop to the illustration.

Interpretations of the material presented here demonstrate the political nature of life within the ABC and concludes that political activity is an important dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

#### 9.1.1 Background

Directors utilise team meetings as an important tool for conducting business within their departments. The working week is heavily time-pressured and, consequently, time is at a premium. Each Director has a large number of direct reports making regular individual meetings impractical. Consequently, in their place, most Directors will hold a weekly team meeting with all the chief officers present, supplemented with additional relevant attendees from the Corporate Centre dealing with items related to diversity, strategy, HR, budget, compliance, legal issues and so forth. The meetings would take a full morning or afternoon. It was preferable to hold the meetings in the morning as it was felt that lunchtime brought an effective hiatus to proceedings and, subsequently, delegates could engage in further activity in the afternoon. Meetings held later in the day had a tendency to drift into the early evening.

#### 9.1.2 Leader voices

Localised management actions, underpinned by personal alliance, need to be considered alongside a major operational shift because of the introduction of strategically focused Directors. As the Directors are compelled to operate from a platform of 'strategic commissioning', legitimised by the Labour government's stance of following a third way between free market and consensus, implications are being felt throughout the organisation and, specifically, by chief officers primarily because of 'concurrent delegation',

*"I'm quite critical and fairly openly; one of the critical points was to give Directors more critical capacity but I'm not sure that's happened."*

**Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

In order for chief officers to assume day-to-day responsibilities for concurrent delegation which provided the same delegative powers as Directors was required. Concurrent delegation has only been partly implemented giving rise to a situation that, within a population of chief officers, some would have concurrent delegation and others would not - the arbiter of which appears to be the date of appointment. New chief officers received concurrent delegation on appointment whilst long serving chief officers did not, giving rise to a degree of dissatisfaction amongst the general population.

*"From the chief officer perspective, who as a population had welcomed the additional authority associated with the structural change, a degree of confusion existed regarding it in practice; where were the effective limits of their authority, would a "step-In" be implemented... Everything had changed, but nothing had changed. Not surprisingly chief officers were starting to show levels of cynicism over the restructuring and even levels of resentment concerning the working reality of their situation."*

*"The buck stops with the chief officer. And we would not have the situation where strategic directors would be interfering on a day-to-day basis. But, and there is always a 'but', the big 'BUT' is that a Director can intervene, there is a process of intervention, there is a veto over the activities of a chief officer. So if something gets out of hand, out of control, if a chief officer has not exercised good judgement, it's becoming a major political issue then the Director can step in - step in rights you might call it, which is a concern to all us."*

*"I don't really see the difference; nobody said in so many words what the benefits would be...the focus was very much what the Strategic Directors wanted. From below, it didn't look any more different then, the blame stopped with me, and I got a lot more emails (laughs). So the workload has increased, it's obvious there is only a certain amount of capacity between the Director and the chief officer, and if the Director says, "well I'm gonna vision now", the work doesn't go away. So as a natural consequence, some stuff comes down, - and of course we're all sitting here saying, "well I'd like to vision as well", because the level I'm operating at, I feel like I should be doing more than just delivery."*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development.**

Unsurprisingly, issues such as concurrent delegation, the right of "step in" the ongoing structural review of the ABC, the definition of the role of Chief Officer and

Director and the recruitment of new chief officers with enhanced levels of responsibility compared to residual members of the team had caused a degree of concern and anxiety,

*“Uncertainty, real uncertainty, have I still got a job in this new structure... I think there is real uncertainty particularly amongst chief officers and it’s difficult to not transfer this down the line.”*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

### **9.1.3 Follower voices**

Following on from comments made by the Director, the Head of the ADS volunteered an opinion regarding the lack of success of the organisation. Rather surprisingly, the points raised were entirely absent in the formal debate concerning the future of the organisation. What was discovered is an example of resistance to a corporate decision that appears to be tolerated. The Head of the ADS explained the predicament.

*“At the review it was agreed that all the design function of the council would be done in design services (ADS). But lots of people have not kept their promises... she has got another person... occasionally recruiting from within the council so-called client officers to commission us to do the work, but they build up their own teams...they’re revenue funded...In Landscape Architects the staff were transferred into this service and they re-grew their own people in Parks and Countryside. So instead of the work being done here, the work is still being done back in Parks and Countryside...”*

**Chief Officer Soar, ADS**

In essence what had occurred here is that a decision was made, following a review conducted by the Assistant Chief Executive, that all ABC architect and design services would be commissioned by the ADS. This effectively never happened as those people in the department who were transferred to the ADS were reallocated back into departments by recruitment drives designed to rebuild their own design function. The rationale for this was that as internal departmental services were paid for from revenue budgets the design service cost, which could range from anything from 6-15% of the total build cost, was covered by the departmental revenue budget allowing the full amount of capital available to be spent on the project. In practice, this move increased the total development fund as design costs were covered elsewhere.

Furthermore, internal departmental design services were commissioning a schedule of work that would not have been possible from within design services. The ADS specified works that were driven primarily for purpose and fit, whilst departmental services were driven exclusively by cost. Not surprisingly, the ADS developed a reputation for being expensive.



Additionally as the departments re-established their own internal design services, they recruited from the ADS. The work force of the ADS was effectively, therefore, being denuded and cannibalised by colleagues from different service functions. The remaining staff in the ADS was collectively regarded as less desirable work colleagues than others.

Finally a member of the ADS was seconded to the Deputy Chief Executive's Department (at his own insistence) to establish what became known as the Public Private Partnership Unit (PPPU), effectively, to oversee and commission capital developments gained as a result of the government's private finance initiative (PFI). Subsequently, work, which was originally designated as the responsibility of the ADS, was now hived off into the new unit that, on paper at least, appeared to generate millions of pounds of additional revenue for the Deputy Chief Executive's Department.

*"I've just decided that I'm stuffed anyway so what the heck... There are a lot of bullish people in the ABC and he who shouts loudest does get to do what he wants. He did get to move his section and form PPPU because he made life too difficult for managers in other areas and I know that for a fact."*

**Chief Officer Soar, ADS**

The Head of the ADS requested and took early retirement less than 6 months after the interview took place.

## 9.2 The illustration

The format for the meeting is very similar to that reported in Chapter 7 concerning the corporate leadership team meeting. In many cases, senior management team meetings are held in the same room as the CLT meeting. A formal agenda is prepared and papers drawn up in support of the various agenda items, the papers are circulated in advance of the meeting. The agenda was surprisingly large with over a dozen agenda items; the supporting pack of documentation was equally intensive. Questions were raised about the amount of time that an attendee would need in order to fully understand and be conversant with all the relevant papers. The impression was that individuals relied upon scanning the documentation prior to the meeting, hoping that they would either follow the discussion or use their own experience and intuition in order to contribute.

As with many other meetings that were chaired by a senior member of the CLT, the atmosphere and conduct of the meeting was very similar. ABC meetings are deferential and formal but not adversely so. Plenty of humour abounds and the group work is jocular and pacey; nevertheless, the group is always respectful toward the chair. At certain times and at the initiation of an agenda item the group collectively seeks guidance from the chair, particularly during challenging or difficult agenda items when it is noticeable that certain members of the group would rather be elsewhere.

One such item related to a discussion concerning an agenda item about the central Architect and Design Service (ADS). It quickly became apparent why someone from the Corporate Services team was present. Before this item, the meeting had been very upbeat, focused on organisation and departmental successes. Despite this, the impression was all very earnest and somewhat self congratulatory but also humbling. The mood changed with the introduction of agenda item 4. One was left to wonder if the previous 25 minutes had been mainly concerned with positioning.

It was learnt that item 4 had previously been raised by the CLT and, consequently, a best value report had been conducted. The findings of the report had been circulated before the meeting with the other papers and they were to be presented by a person from outside of the department. It was noted that the Head of the ADS was a participant of the meeting and was sat at the table. The report was presented as being the speaker's work leaving questions concerning the involvement of the Head of the ADS. The ADS is a partnership organisation between the internal design services function and a private sector architectural and design company. The ADS is, therefore, meant to be responsible for the delivery of capital building projects within the ABC. The scope of such works can vary from hospital refurbishment and Art Gallery redesign, to the design, build and

commissioning of a large Olympic swimming pool.<sup>6</sup> The associated paper outlined the discussion and issues concerning the ADS, which fundamentally were related to the current forecast of the ADS making a deficit of £0.5m.

Following the presentation the debate concerning the ADS ensued. The deferential and respectful tone of the debate was maintained. Contribution, however, amongst the attendees, was virtually uniform. It was clear that the group was informed and had an opinion. The debate started and each delegate's opinion appeared to carry equal validity; eventually, members started to defer to those with more technical experience and position and consequently maintained its overtones of respect to the chair. One is reminded of romance tales concerning the court of King Arthur and his knights collected at the round table.

The debate continued for some 20 minutes when the Chair (Director) first made an attempt to close the conversation. The last few minutes of the debate had become repetitive with members starting to revisit previous contributions. Iteratively the meeting descended into increasing levels of complexity, intricacy and personal experience, which added little to the apparent fact that the ADS loses money because internal departments choose not to use the function but, locally and unilaterally, decide to use external bodies for design and building services outside of the ADS and the ABC in general. As far as agreeing a course of action, pertaining to the future of the ADS, the group seemed no closer to agreement than 20 minutes earlier. The Director concluded by stating that the work needed to be addressed and that a paper should be brought back for discussion regarding options at which point it could be submitted to the CLT in six weeks.

It was only after some considerable debate that the Head of the ADS decided to contribute. His initial comments in the discussion were fully understanding and supportive of the process. He stated openly that the ADS was an issue and it must be decided what to do with the partnership. His comments were carefully structured and very guarded, in keeping with the general tone of the debate to that point. Criticisms of the ADS were

---

<sup>6</sup> The ADS is situated in a separate building from the main civic hall. Whilst from the exterior the building looks austere and foreboding (it is a Victorian School building) the inside is very corporate. The reception lobby is very different in presentation from other buildings within the authority. As a design function it represents contemporary design with lots of chrome and aluminium on show. Present also are examples of successful projects and literature including internal and external marketing materials. The ADS does not look like it is part of the ABC and has established its own visual identity.

Inside, however, the presentation of the organisation changes as the workspace and desks are entirely representative of those seen in the rest of the authority; functional and depersonalised.

made around the table, which he acknowledged. Collectively, however, the comments were a continued critical assault and were not very helpful. The Head of the ADS became increasingly withdrawn, frustrated and started to look hurt and annoyed.

Despite the Director wanting to move on and suggesting some action to allow the group to move on, the Finance manager and another member of the committee reinitiated the debate. There seemed to be a reluctance to conclude. The field notes state it was like “the last voice wins” and the feeling was reminiscent of a wildlife programme where the pack sense the weakness of one of their own and turn upon the unfortunate, ultimately driving it from the pack. The Director attempted to close this debate again but failed - more conversation and, again, further attempts to end the discussion. The debate lasted some 75 minutes, at which point the Director managed to close this agenda item and call for a break. There had been no agreed action taken.

During the break the ADS chief officer was heard to say, “I feel a bit pissed off.” Further sporadic but increasingly more heated spats interspersed the coffee break. As an aside, the Director attempted to explain what had been witnessed. Fundamentally, the Director drew attention to the complexity of personal alliances and relationships throughout the ABC, which enabled the possibility of localised management decisions, many of which may be contrary to the formalised expectations of the organisation centrally.

### 9.3 Politics

In the preceding chapters, a complex picture of organisational life at the ABC has been presented. This has included the outlining of significant dynamics that impact upon the leader follower relationship. The interaction of the dynamics strongly affects the leader follower relationship and, subsequently, the organisation. The interpretations made in this section focus on how leaders and followers deal with the complexities and ambiguities already uncovered in earlier chapters to conclude that widespread use of political activity comprises an important dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

Leaders have become skilled in progressing activities within the ABC in a style that is particular to them. Officers that had been recruited from outside the ABC had remarked upon how they had found the methods of working different to their previous organisation. Within the ABC, leaders had developed, a consensual style that attempts to create a positive and supporting environment. Allowing and encouraging debate and contribution, ensuring that peers and subordinate officers are not exposed to detrimental pressures, either from elected members or other officers, and demonstrating strong personal ethics in accordance with the notions of the public sector ethos; all of which are factors that contribute to the overall successful operation of the organisation.

Underneath the surface of the awards and successes of the organisation lies a maelstrom of dynamics; shaping, reinforcing and reinventing relationships between leaders and followers at all levels. Some of these have been identified and so attention must be given to the processes of how the dynamics coalesce, converge and progress.

There is an increasingly large literature that supports the presence of politics in organisations. Mintzberg's analysis shows that organisations can be appreciated, either wholly or in part, as a political arena (Mintzberg, 1985). The activities of elected members between themselves - the resignation of Councillor Wharfe, the early retirement of the ADS chief officer, the observed struggle and subsequent mediation by the chief executive at CLT, the actions of chief officers toward RACI, rhetorical statements concerning the value of leadership - all appear to be politically motivated actions and behaviours. Observation of specific events within the ABC leads to the conclusion that political activity resonates throughout the organisation.

The observation and conclusions made may lead to the classification of the ABC as a complete political arena due to the intense and pervasive nature of the political activity to be found within it. However, classification is not too important here for two reasons. The first is that other classifications described by Mintzberg could fit equally well and, secondly, a critically motivated observer may be able to discern

political motivations in all of the actions within the organisation. However, the weight of evidence, complimented by much of the literature, allows for the conclusion of the ABC as a political arena where the levels of political activity and behaviour are high. Furthermore, the literature supports the notion that politics and political behaviour can have profound affects on organisations and, therefore, by association, the leaders and followers of the organisation. Despite this, however, there is very little consideration given to politics in leadership, an observation considered surprising by leadership scholars (House & Aditya, 1997).

Motivated in part by the comments of House and Aditya and the conspicuous absence of politics in leadership studies, Ammeter and colleagues, in an extensive study, begin to address this deficiency and model a political theory of leadership (Ammeter et al, 2002). This breakthrough study is to be applauded as it provoked a special edition of the Leadership Quarterly on the political perspectives in Leadership (Issue 4, 2004) generating additional contributions to the subject. This study allows for further advancement toward the appreciation of politics in leadership by making the following contributions.

Ammeter and colleagues are very specific in their view of politics as a contributor to organisational leadership. They define politics in organisations as a neutral activity but also state that politics in organisational leadership can be seen as the “constructive management of shared meaning” (Ammeter et al, 2002 p.751). It is the contention here that the definition and application is too narrow. The authors express the view that leadership studies have been rationally constrained and have traditionally considered a limited set of variables whilst ignoring other potentially relevant aspects. Furthermore, they argue that leadership theory is deficient in areas related to leadership style, particularly when directed to superiors and peers, and that there is a need for theory to be placed in context. During the course of the study, the authors focus on leadership traits and, therefore, continue along the leadership studies status quo. The reason for conducting their research from this platform appears clear. Firstly, the authors adopt a definition of leadership as,

*“... that gives purpose, meaning, and guidance to collectivities by articulating a collective vision that appeals to ideological values, motives and self-perceptions of followers.”*

**Ammeter et al, (2002 p.753)**

This definition is a clear reference to the neo-charismatic view of leadership and is, therefore, inculcated in a variety of definitional shortcomings already noted. Specifically working from such a definition, the authors are placing political activity within a framework that contributes to their own definition of leadership. It is the conclusion of this study that political behaviour as a dynamic of the leader follower relationship need not contribute

favourably at all. Political acts may have repercussions not designed by individuals and they may become part of the context within which the leaders and followers are acting.

There is an implied assumption within leadership studies and, in particular, normative appreciations that leadership is a beneficial commodity to be sought, developed and nurtured within organisations. If leadership is taken as an influence process then there is the distinct possibility that the influences may be detrimental, negative, evil, pointless, self-serving and so forth. Largely, issues of bad leadership have been ignored within leadership studies, with the exception of some contributors, notably Kellerman (2004), Kets de Vries (2003) and Conger and Kanungo (1998). Ammeter et al, do not touch upon issues related to the negative possibilities inherent in an influence relationship, and by ignoring the possibilities of negative aspects of leadership, a complete understanding of leadership will always remain distant. It is not possible on the one hand to have a leader but on the other to have a 'power wielder'; the definitions do not bear up to scrutiny.

This study shows that political activity may not always be beneficial to the collective. Certainly, in the example of the chief officer of the ADS, the political activities created millions in revenue for one part of an organisation to the detriment of another. However the principal casualties remain the ADS itself and its chief officer who, despite years of good and accomplished service, felt overburdened by the political environment to the extent that he left the ABC and took early retirement. Morgan reminds us of the possibility of political activity underpinned by large-scale bureaucracy giving rise to a particular form of normalised control that can dominate entire organisations (Morgan, 1997). This study demonstrates that narrowing the area of research to meet only the positive aspects of leadership does a disservice to all.

It is important to recognise the issues around why individuals feel the need to engage in political activity. The study by Ammeter and colleagues does not cover this as an antecedent of their theory, preferring to rely upon the limitations of definition to state that leaders engage in political activity as a functional requirement of benefiting the collective. The authors recognise that political behaviour may be undertaken for other purposes but choose not to recognise those activities as they do not fit the definition of leadership. Political behaviour is, therefore, taken to be a neutral activity, neither good nor bad, but an essential part of organisational functioning. This study agrees that political activity is an essential part of organisational life but the divisions of political behaviour as either included in leadership or excluded from leadership, due to the outcome of the activity, is erroneous. Political activity by leaders has repercussions across the organisation, the outcomes of which are undetermined. Behaviours can result in outcomes that are both favourable to the organisation but detrimental to the individual or any other permutation imaginable.

The political theory of leadership, as outlined in the study by Ammeter and colleagues, is in essence an exclusively leader-centric theory. Political activity is undertaken by leaders in order to narrow ambiguity and promote understanding where uncertainty exists. Followers, as in many other studies, are theorised to be the recipients of political behaviour and act as a homogenous and compliant whole. In the study by Ammeter and colleagues, it is stated that leaders need to adopt political behaviours that match the situational assessments of their follower counterparts, which is a simpler process if followers act as a compliant and homogenous grouping. When followers have independent agency, and are capable of a moderating identity and being manipulative, the issues of adopting appropriate political behaviour become exponentially more complicated. Ammeter et al's study does not incorporate follower engagement in political behaviour into its findings. It is the conclusion of this study that followers have a level of agency beyond that usually theorised in leadership studies, and that they are as skilled and as manipulative as their leader counterparts. As leaders engage in political activity, so do followers.

This finding has implications for leadership studies. Normative models following a functional paradigm have asserted the predominance of the leader to the detriment of the follower. Few writers in the mainstream have focused attention on the contribution of followers, appreciating them only as moderators or constructors of leadership. It has been maintained that followers do not engage in followership (Rost, 1993). As one of the constituents in the leader follower relationship the act of following is part of the relationship. When followers act in a way that is seemingly not in accordance with leader designs it is often referred to as resistance, but as the actions of followers have an impact on leaders, it is safe to conclude that followers do engage in followership as they are acting from a position of informed agency in order to achieve something.

Evidence has been presented in the preceding section and elsewhere that political behaviour is both intensive and pervasive within the ABC; some consideration should be given now to make interpretations as to why the incidence of political behaviour is so high. Firstly, it is evident that levels of political activity are high within the ABC, to the extent that everyone has the capacity to engage should they wish. Pfeffer (1981) has argued that there is a match between political skill and the individual's preference for political organisations. In other words, the political nature of the ABC draws people with ability at political engagement toward it. Once inside the organisation the individual is met by a set of unique constraints imposed by, and upon, the organisation; this requires political ability to make sense of and circumvent some of the more restrictive arrangements and the impositions of elected members. In a sense, the use of political activity is the modus operandi by which business is conducted within the ABC as officers model their behaviour on other perceptibly more successful officers. Secondly, political



skill is required to protect position and resource allocation within the structure. Ferris and colleagues assert that political skill is a prerequisite for survival in organisations (Ferris et al, 2007); consequently, those in positions of seniority are likely to be those with political ability. And finally, it is the contention here that application of political behaviours and skill will enhance individual career prospects. This proposition is given more attention in the next chapter.

In defence of the findings and theory development reported in the study by Ammeter and colleagues, this current study supports many of the arguments contained within it. As Ammeter's study relies heavily on leadership trait analysis conducted within a functional research paradigm, its conclusions are orchestrated to match the theoretical underpinnings of their normative counterparts and are, therefore, not as far reaching as they perhaps could have been. Nevertheless, the authors have instigated a level of debate and research into an important dynamic of the leader follower relationship. In agreement with the aforementioned study, this study concludes that politics is an important dynamic in the leader follower relationship.

## Chapter 10 - illustration 6

*"I think how I got on was I realised, I learned you had to play the game. A lot of what we do is playing that game, isn't it?"*

**Chief Officer Greet, Corporate Services**

### 10.1 Meeting the Leader

This illustration is actually comprised of two events that occurred sequentially. The illustrations concern the meeting between a Director and the elected Leaders of the ABC.

Interpretations of the meetings show how an individual in a formal follower position is able to resist leaders. As it was demonstrated in an earlier chapter how leaders establish their leadership, this chapter is concerned with how followers establish the strength of their own followership. The interpretations deal with aspects of power within the authority and conclude that strong followers and leaders continually negotiate their relationship in accordance with rules of a 'game'. It is the game, therefore, that comprises a dynamic of the leader follower relationship.

#### 10.1.1 Background

As the hierarchical changes in structure was relatively new, it is considered, that the changes in emphasis were still effectively being embedded within the organisation. Some officers, as will be shown, felt enough of the system had been experienced in order to make comment and to identify areas in which the elegance of the ABC structure was becoming slightly unravelled. The illustration demonstrates the complexity of the task to be accomplished and gives insights into the dynamics of the leader follower relationship.

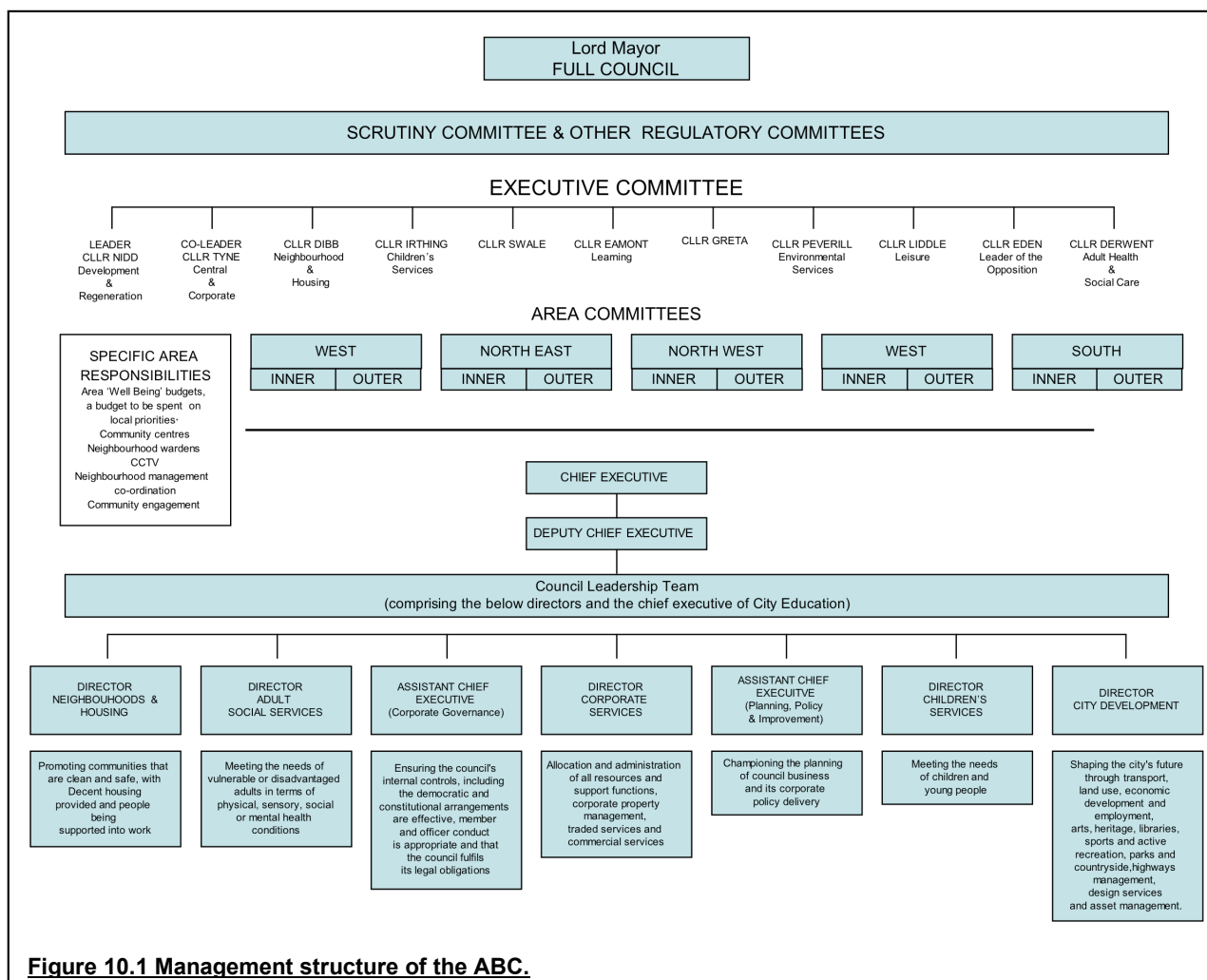
The shift in senior manager emphasis presented a particular challenge for the organisation, as it constituted a fundamental change in the way the organisation was to be administrated/managed. The continued progression of the ABC was perceived to be dependent upon the application of skills and competencies by the four principal Directors in balancing the operational responsibility for a very complex service function whilst developing a higher strategic focus. Additionally this transition required the delegation and reallocation of responsibilities between the Directors and their various reporting chief officers. As the Directors assumed a more strategic view, so the chief officer was required to assume operational responsibility for the delivery of their particular service function.

The Directors however maintain a fall back position of 'step in' should the need arise and are able to reassume personal control and responsibility for those areas of which they are formally accountable. This process is referred to internally as "concurrent delegation".

The organisation considered this organisational design to represent the optimum chance for progress against many of the obstacles to be overcome. Aligned with this structure is a contingent belief that a strategic perspective and the competence of the Directors to

deliver effectively on their responsibilities required an upgrading and emphasis on individual and organisational leadership skills.

A further significant change in the structure of the ABC had materialised as elected members had realised more executive authority within the Council (see figure 10.1 for the ABC management structure). An Executive Committee had been established comprising



**Figure 10.1 Management structure of the ABC.**

elected Members some of whom had been granted additional responsibilities by the full Council that comprised portfolios for central and corporate council functions. As an additional but also significant change, Members had been provided with offices within the civic centre of the council. This had resulted in a fundamental shift in perspective and operation. Before these changes, elected Members were required to visit the offices of the specific officer with responsibility for the service under question. Now council officers were required to attend the Member in their own office to discuss the issue at hand.

*"Perish the thought that councillors would be based on the premises...It's a massive change in the psychology of the relationship between officers and*

*members. The change came when (name removed) was leader of the council and he got himself ensconced in an old office in the annexe... He had three comfy seats outside his office and he used to summon the Directors to come and see him and have them waiting on the comfy seats for up to half an hour. Now that sends a massive signal as to who is in charge."*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

Furthermore, the role of councillor provided a small stipend. This grew to a substantial salary for those members with executive responsibilities. The consequence of this is that the councillors were a body of employed elected officials, many of whom required no other additional employment or income. Elected Members were much more visible than they had been previously and this had contributed to a rise in the overall volume of work that officers were required to do in order to support the elected membership, not all of it considered to be valuable.

*"Massive change in the culture of the organisation creates a lot more work and pressure, and it's nuisance value really."*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

Due to the nature of the hung council and the alliance between two minority parties in forming the ruling administration, Directors were required to meet, on a frequent basis, both Leaders of the ruling coalition parties. At any one time, one party would be the formal Leader whilst the second formed a type of Under Leader. So whilst Councillor Nidd is the formal leader, Councillor Tyne maintains his position on the executive but acts in a supporting capacity as the formal Leader chairs the Executive Committee. The roles of the two alternate every 6 months with the co-Leader becoming the formal Leader and Chair of the Executive Committee. The executive responsibilities of both Councillors remain the same during their time in office. Councillor Tyne had been in post for a short while following the leadership election as a consequence of Councillor Wharfe's resignation. Councillor Tyne was not the favourite to win the election perceived as being a slightly grey and innocuous candidate. The favourite, a well-known, committed and astute politician, failed in the election which was attributed to over confidence and a lack of canvassing.

**10.1.2 Leader voices**

Consequently, the impact of the elected membership on the organisation and, in particular, the perceived impact on the careers of officers has grown significantly in terms of influence. One officer credits an early posting to the corporate centre that has close links with the elected members as being significant,

*"I've had quite a lot of (political) exposure – as you do if you're at the corporate centre."*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

As part of the job role, in this particular case, is that junior officers would be present in a room when members of committees were conducting reviews with more senior officers.

*"What was particularly interesting is that we would be in the room for the full session and the Directors at the time would come in and out for various items... And what was particularly interesting was what was said to them while they were in the room and what was said about them after they had gone out."*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

By all accounts, the members at the time were apparently quite candid in their opinions of Directors who had been consulted over particular issues. Younger, more junior members must have been affected by such a performance and would have in all likelihood been equally candid outside of the meeting with what they had witnessed.

Although five directorates are acknowledged, the Chief Executive's Unit does comprise a notional sixth department. Although this department is comparatively very small in terms of personnel, a considerable amount of influence is held by the department, which is unsurprising considering that the most senior roles of Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive are located in it. The formal reporting lines of the other five Strategic Directors also end within the Chief Executive's Unit. The role of Assistant Chief Executive appears anomalous within the overall structure of the organisation as it has no direct service responsibility but maintains accountability for internal functions such as communications or legal services.

Many of the initiatives relating to organisational strategy, effectiveness and efficiency are oriented around the office of the Assistant Chief Executive, a primary initiative of which is the development of a 'One Council' ethos. This headline development, from an outside perspective at least, encapsulates many of the other initiatives that are ongoing within the ABC. Encapsulated within the Council's change programme, branded "Smarter Working: Better Results" established in 2006, the notion of 'One Council' as taken from the corporate strategic plan (Council Business Plan, 2008 p.11) outlines the importance of the ABC being perceived as, and acting as, a 'coherent whole' ultimately leading to cultural change and establishing a more professional corporate organisation.

An interesting and alternative view of the authority and influence of the leading population of the ABC came from an unscheduled and informal meeting with the ex-Leader of the Council. Set in a restaurant in the city the meeting took place a couple of weeks after the Councillor had announced his resignation as Leader. During the course of this meeting (due to the ad hoc nature of this meeting notes were only taken after the event and the

conversation went unrecorded) a number of insights were volunteered. The ex-Leader had felt that his time in office was a period that had ultimately proved very frustrating. It was his opinion that the officer core had become very skilled in dictating the pace of business within the organisation. Initiatives that the ruling administration had wanted to implement were, in the opinion of the ex-Leader, filibustered and ultimately never saw the light of day. He mentioned that he felt significantly underpowered in his capacity to steer the organisation in a direction and that, consequently, he focused on areas that he could affect as opposed to those that he needed to affect. Similarly his motivations for becoming a Councillor had been to make the lives of his constituents better; this he found difficult as he became very frustrated by the machinations of the organisation and, in particular, the officers whom he regarded as being responsible.

### **10.1.3 Follower voices**

It is evident that the Members' influence on the ABC had been quite substantial and not all of this influence should be seen as detrimental when considered from the follower perspective. As reported above it is clear that officers can specifically benefit in terms of career enhancement from a close association with the elected Members. Similar benefits may also occur should the respective officer enjoy a close association with the corporate centre. It is in this arena that blurring occurs as to which grouping may have most impact on the career path of officers. An association with the corporate centre means that geographically the officer is directly associated with the senior, most powerful officers of the authority but, also, through the course of day-to-day interaction, come into close association with elected officials.

The following statements support the notion that careers may be enhanced by close corporate or political association. One such example concerns the appointment of an individual who had risen to the attentions of the corporate centre as a talented and committed officer.

*"He's very talented and he's recognised as such - corporately. So part of it is saying, well here's an opportunity to give him a leg up. He'll be consolidated at that level some time in the future; it's almost a signal to the rest of the world, I suppose, that here's a fast lane character and don't be surprised when he gets the next chief officer job – which is the way the organisation has always worked."*

#### **Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

The individual had been seconded to another role in a different department for three months initially. Under agreements with the Union, this is the maximum amount of time a secondment can be allowed without the job role becoming subject to agreed procedures of open opportunity and competitive recruitment.

*“He was only supposed to go for three months, and we all knew that was nonsense – it was done to pacify the unions, because they said if he’s going to be employed in that role for more than three months it should be advertised. He’s been there three months now and there’s no sign of him coming back.”*

**Chief Officer Maun, City Development**

A second example as reported above relates to the apparent fast track development of the Assistant Chief Executive who had either enjoyed or deliberately cultivated strong associations with the corporate centre and subsequently with the elected membership.

*“Yes, he punches way above his weight in this organisation, which some of us struggle to understand why, not because he hasn’t got ability, but it’s difficult to comprehend why, somebody who, before he went to the corporate centre was way below chief officer level and in a very short period of time has risen to Assistant Chief Executive level and is punching above Strategic Directors. In actual fact, and I struggle to work it out... sometimes you have a theory, but I don’t have a theory in this case...”*

**Chief Officer Idle, City Development**

The second issue, drawn out of statements made from a leader perspective, is one of frustration. Members and the Leader of the Council, in particular, reported frustration at not being able to conduct the business of the council primarily due to the obstacles provided by the officer core. Officers of the council, on the other hand, were aware of this position and shared the frustration,

*“We’re all trying to operate within a framework, but within that framework be as positive as we can. We take the agenda of the current administration and we say, “Well, within this framework can we help them deliver that agenda.” But from a member’s perspective that can seem quite rigid...”*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

with the almost inevitable result that frustrations boiled over into more confrontational behaviour,

*"Councillor Liddle has lambasted me on any number of occasions... "You're here to do what I tell you!" and I say, "No, I'm here to do what the executive board decides to do within the law of the land". And some members get frustrated with that, even the Leader from time to time...particularly when we appear to be black-hatting."*<sup>7</sup>

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

These two statements combined not only demonstrate the awareness of Members' frustrations but is also an admission that, occasionally, the officer core is specifically responsible. At times, Members have been able to create a situation where officers have aligned themselves with the Members' cause, despite possibly being in opposition to the officer core.

*"For councillors the ideal is that somebody breaks ranks from the officer core and says I can write that report as you want it... They weren't highly regarded in the past, but now people feel sorry for them."*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

This statement appears to present the relationship between members and officers as an oppositional relationship. It is, however, one of the central contentions of this study that work-based social relations are rarely so straightforward, and that relationships may be both oppositional and symbiotic. Officers are well aware, as demonstrated above, that opportunities for political exposure can be very beneficial to their career prospects. The association involved, however, is not one of pandering to the aspirations of elected Members as this as a course of action may prove detrimental to the individual.

Whilst, elected Members and the corporate centre may provide opportunities for enhancement, as with the elected membership, the association with the corporate centre has the potential to be limiting to career prospects.

*"There's a feeling now that you're invited to express a view, but it has to be the right view. There's definitely a feeling that you can't speak out - they're not actually listening to chief officers."*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

---

<sup>7</sup> This appears to be a reference to the negative perspective one adopts in Edward De Bono's Six Thinking Hats. de Bono, E. 2000. **Six Thinking Hats**. London: Penguin.



Additionally,

*“When I meet my boss I get the impression that she doesn’t want me to change. There’s an element for all of us about ‘playing the game.’ There’s almost an element of fear amongst some of the Strategic Directors about speaking out because of being seen to be ‘on message’.”*

**Chief Officer Leen, City Development**

This concept of ‘playing a game’ is a concept that was mentioned on more than one occasion,

*“There’s an element for all of us of playing the game, we’re all on board with ‘From Good to Great’ officially, but...,”*

**Chief Officer Poulter, City Development**

and,

*“I think how I got on was I realised, I learned, you had to play the game. A lot of what we do is playing that game, isn’t it?”*

**Chief Officer Greet, Corporate Services**

## 10.2 The illustration

### 10.2.1 A meeting with Councillor Nidd

The committee room was fairly typical of the ABC; nondescript and lacking personalisation or identifiable associative features of the authority. Within the room, Councillor Nidd was positioned at a large wooden round table at the far end of the room; the Director was invited to sit directly opposite, leaving a good three metres of space between the two. The atmosphere was informal and friendly but still deferential. Councillor Nidd required reference to himself to be made using his formal title of 'Leader' whilst in formal office, but as Councillor Nidd when performing the Co-Leader role. He was never referred to by his Christian name in marked contrast to Councillor Wharfe who had tried to promote a level of informality in his dealings with the senior officers of the authority.

With the usual deferential overtones, ensuring that 'place' was maintained, the meeting was initiated in an affable environment. However, the opening statement of the Leader set the tone,

*"...got me on a bad day,"* he stated, which was followed by an account of the Leader's perception of inefficiencies in the Director's fellow officers. The Leader came over as being very comfortable in his surroundings and also quite arrogant. The Director did not particularly acknowledge the Leader's criticisms and did not seek to defend or put in context any other officer's actions. It was clear, however, that the Director and the Leader had known each other for a considerable time and were comfortable in each other's company. No agenda had been set for the meeting and so the Director was left simply to respond to whatever point the Leader wished to discuss next. Usually each topic was provocatively introduced with an associated action. *"What we want to do is to issue a press statement."* *"This won't wait."* *"We're more of a 'can do' council. ...get it knocked down!"* *"Right...what's next is..."*

The meeting lasted approximately half an hour during which there were two substantive points. The first related to the acquisition of more temporary car parking in the city, which was, firstly, contrary to the ABC travel strategy and, secondly, difficult to achieve due to the planning requirements of the authority. It was revealed that more parking spaces would raise more revenues for the city. The second point related to a statue of a prominent individual in the City's history and the maintenance of the statue, which merged into a further point regarding the amount of public art in the city generally. Both points raised were demanding but, despite the practically impossible nature of the two requests, the Director accepted both points with a minimum of concern. Moreover, the Director was happy to appease the Leader with a series of acquiescent statements about "looking at it". This was confirmed later in the day when, during a meeting, the Director received a message to call Councillor Nidd and that it was urgent. It was some 40

minutes later that the Director returned the call and after the call simply said,

*"It wasn't urgent, it never is... he already knows this. Happens all the time."*

The Director explained that one of their team had been asked to brief the Leader directly on the issue discussed over the phone. The Director knew that this briefing had taken place and that the Leader had been satisfied with the content. Nevertheless, at a later date, he had sought either to undermine or ignore the advice given, going directly to the Director to tread over ground already walked upon.

#### **10.2.2 A meeting with Councillor Tyne**

As with Councillor Nidd, the meeting took place at the party offices within the Civic Hall. The meeting room was entirely similar but had a rectangular table and a workstation and desk in the corner. The formal cosiness of the conversation meeting with Councillor Nidd was not replicated here, the Director being more guarded and slightly more anxious. The conversation took on a similar line to the meeting with Councillor Nidd earlier in the day.

Councillor Tyne introduced himself, principally for the benefit of the researcher. He was keen to maintain a posture, similar to Councillor Nidd, of being action oriented, *"Bring me the hard choices!"*, *"Yeah do It!"* he extolled, and maintained that he was not in a popularity contest and was prepared to make the hard decisions required, although it was not clear as to what hard decisions he was referring to. To an extent, much of this appeared to be posturing and Councillor Tyne, like Councillor Nidd, appeared to be slightly out of step with the modus operandi of the council and not fully cognisant of the processes that were put in place to stop officers and Members alike from acting in an arbitrary manner outside of the committee structure.

Much of the conversation, like the meeting with the Leader, dealt with operational issues; matters which the organisational structure had empowered chief officers the authority to resolve. There was no prepared agenda and the Director did not know in advance what the issues were to be tabled for discussion. The first point dealt with the ABC's display in a National Flower show, the involvement in which had been criticised by the local media, due to the cost. *"Do you believe we had a good story?"* he asked. The Director answered politically, but was very transparent, making Councillor Tyne aware of a difficulty, risking exposure to criticism. Councillor Tyne appeared to become defensive and, consequently, moved on to a discussion related to income levels from the city's sports centres. The Director admitted to a deficit of approximately £1m but defended it as part of the ABC's commitment to service delivery and wider social agendas related to provision of sport and health. Councillor Tyne suggested that the council should *"Close it."* The Director maintained that the department would bring some options, although it was not clear who should receive and deal with the options, as Leisure provision within the City was managed at Executive level by Councillor Liddle, a member of an opposition party but part of the ruling coalition. Following a further topic relating to an issue of viability, a topic

that had clearly been covered before, to which the Director suggested that one of their chief officers should arrange to talk through the viabilities, Councillor Tyne concluded the formal part of the meeting by stating,

*"Is there anything you want to say to me?"*

The meeting lasted for less than twenty minutes, but as the Director made to leave, Councillor Tyne initiated a further discussion regarding government funds of £14m in support of cycling. It emerged later that Councillor Tyne was a keen cyclist. The city needed a champion he suggested to support bids for development capital. *"Make sure he wears a helmet"*, he further added. A final issue was raised; it was almost as if the joint Leader had dealt with the business of the council from his perspective of the Leader and was now engaging in more local issues associated with his role as Ward Councillor. This final issue related to the rights of use related to a common within the city boundaries and a building that had been leased to a local group at a favourable rate. The Councillor reported that this rate was too high and that the Council should seek to help the tenants additionally. He implied a level of expectation and it emerged that the common in question fell into Councillor Tyne's ward. Furthermore, the issue seemed to be incongruent with the previous discussion about reduction in income at sports centres, to which the favoured opinion appeared to be closing the centres; whereas in this context the Councillor was seeking a reduction in the cost of a lease, which would lead to a reduction in ABC revenues.

### 10.3 “Playing the game”

The illustration given in the previous section shows how leaders and followers negotiate their relationship with each other. Exposure to leaders within the organisation affords potential opportunities to followers. As earlier chapters have demonstrated, the tactics leaders used in maintaining their authority, this section is primarily concerned, with how followers are able to strengthen their own position by potentially obstructing leaders and establishing their own agency.

This section concludes that leaders and followers perceive their relationship amongst themselves, and with other parts of the organisation, as playing a role in a game. The appreciation and practical application of the rules of the game are important in establishing the position of individual leaders and followers; it is the game, therefore, that comprises an important dynamic in the leader follower relationship.

The illustration of the two meetings between Directors and the Leader(s) of the Council demonstrates the capacity of followers to maintain their own position whilst adhering to the formal requirements of the job role by acquiescing to a more senior colleague. The meeting is polite and deferential but the follower is deliberately able to divert any points discussed and, as a consequence, remains non-committal throughout the proceedings. To the observer the meeting seemed to serve no practical value at all, but appeared to be imbued with political significance as both parties established their positions.

In these illustrations, the Director acts from a follower platform but is able to establish the strength of their position as follower; there are other examples given where followers can be demonstrated to possess and protect their significance. For instance, the organisation can be shown to hold a bureaucratic apparatus that permeates all levels of the organisation. Officers can, at times, find it convenient to utilise the apparatus in an obstructive capacity and as a result frustrate elected members. It is mentioned above that the outgoing Leader of the Council felt at times powerless in the face of officers establishing the strength of their own followership and, subsequently, filibustering the designs of the Leaders. Officers in turn also recount examples of Members' frustrations with officers and processes as being quite vociferous, and also suggest that they may at times be deliberately 'black hatting'. Similarly, it is also possible to see other minor incidents throughout the organisation as attempts by the officers to bolster the position of their followership and assert its strength.

It has been remarked upon how the technical competence of an individual is valued within the authority. This technical skill has additional value when it comes to asserting the strength of a follower's position. In complex issues the officer with the

technical knowledge pertaining to the issue will be able to maintain a position of strength against a less knowledgeable manager or elected Member. Many of the issues faced by the ABC require considerable technical knowledge and expertise. This may range from practical engineering construction for capital projects to knowledge related to the statutory powers the ABC may on the one hand utilise and, on the other, restrict. This technical legislative knowledge can also apply to procedural issues. Officers within the Chief Executive's Unit are the experts related to the powers of the authority, its legislative framework and other statutory covenants that dictate the authority's powers of action. The ABC employs a large group of technical legal experts to advise officers and members alike on due process and to militate against the authority exploiting its legal powers illegally. In these examples, followers with a technical expertise are able to maintain the strength of their follower position by virtue of the knowledge they hold.

In some respects the ability of followers to assert the value of their own followership cannot be more clearly illustrated than when considering the example of career progression within the authority. Followers and, in particular, politically motivated and skilled followers recognise that a close association with the premier power bases of the authority can be particularly beneficial in terms of career enhancement. The power bases referred to here are firstly the elected Members and, specifically, the Executive Board which comprises the political power base and the Chief Executive's Unit, which makes up the corporate power base. In the preceding section an example was given of an officer who was seconded to another department. The individual in question had come to the attention of the corporate centre and had been given the chance of a more senior role. This was an indication that this individual would become consolidated as a chief officer when the opportunity arose. Examples like this abound throughout the organisation, where officers have risen to great prominence without having to face any form of recruitment process. Surprisingly this is reported to include the Chief Executive.

In the ABC, followers are given numerous opportunities to establish networks of connections with more senior officers throughout the organisation. Skilled followers have the capacity to exploit these openings to build associations with the senior officers they come into contact with. In doing so, they establish their follower position with leaders; not limited by their formal superordinate managers. This process of establishing follower position enhances their influence throughout the organisation, allowing them further chances to build more association, and so progress their careers within the ABC.

An example of a politically skilled individual rising through the ranks quickly is the Assistant Chief Executive. The rise of this individual has taken many of his colleagues by surprise but taken from the perspective of an individual establishing

their follower position through politically motivated activity such as networking, building alliances and generating influence, the rapid progression through the hierarchy makes more sense. The individual has demonstrated courage or, at least, taken calculated risks in managing difficult projects, and has become the name associated with the organisation's change programme and business improvement initiatives, and is the external face of the organisation, in that the individual is responsible for the marketing and communication function. Much of this has been facilitated by the individual's capacity to develop relationships with officers that are more senior and to cultivate influence through visible and careful self-promotion; the Assistant Chief Executive enjoyed a very close alliance with the Deputy Chief Executive. A relationship that is significant in establishing the strength of the followership position reciprocates by strengthening the status of the leader position of the superordinate manager.

This phenomenon is worth considering further from a wider leadership/political perspective. Mintzberg supports the Aristotelian view of politics and shows that political activity is undertaken when there is a diversity of interest (Mintzberg, 1985). A diversity of interest can be taken as individuals thinking and behaving differently. This difference is likely to arise during times of organisational stress and when the organisation is responding to, or attempting to, change. Evidence has been given that the ABC is undergoing a great deal of change through the organisational restructuring brought about by the statutory formation of the Children's Services directorate, the Blairite imposition of strategic commissioning, continued focus and reform from central government and the operational requirement of resolving a series of 'wicked problems'. From a normative perspective it is theorised that a heroic leader will emerge to inspire followers along a vision or course of action. Such heroic leaders possess the particular quality of charisma and hence the term 'charismatic leader'. Ferris and associates (2007) have expressed the view that political skill and charisma appear to be the same thing. This study agrees with this position in part; politically skilled individuals have the capacity to present themselves as effective leaders, charismatic or otherwise. This study would assert that there is closer liaison between leadership generally and political ability than limiting the association to just leadership of the charismatic variety. It is entirely feasible that a diversity of interest permeates every leader follower relationship. This can be derived from the ambiguity of the role played and the different perspectives associated with being a leader or follower, and leads to the conclusion that political behaviour is not only inevitable in leader follower relationships, but that it may comprise a substantial part of the whole relationship.

Studies have demonstrated that political activity can either be sanctioned or non-sanctioned (Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001). Sanctioned political behaviour matches the

expectations of the organisation, whereas non-sanctioned behaviour could lead to questions being raised concerning the suitability of that individual remaining within the organisation. It has been asserted here that political skill is important in career progression within the ABC, as achieving a more senior leader position requires leaders to be convinced of a follower's credentials. Mintzberg maintains that the resolution of tensions within organisations may require political behaviour defined as a game (Mintzberg, 1985). A number of statements have been collected and some of them are presented within the preceding section that supports the notion of leaders and followers being engaged in a game.

It may be suggested that the 'playing of a game' may not comprise a dynamic on its own, but is a product of the others. The previous dynamics comprise the playing field over which actors are engaged in playing a game. This point has been considered and it is represented by some of the empirical material presented. Yet it is maintained that playing a game represents a different dynamic. This is principally because notions of playing a game conjure up a sense of playing within a set of codified rules. One need only watch people playing games/sport to recognise that games incorporate high elements of gamesmanship outside the rules. For one to assume that those playing the game respect the rules smacks of a sense of Corinthian 'fair play' and does not represent the whole picture.

Successful playing of a game involves being perceived to be operating within the rules, ensuring that one is not ejected from the game; this implies that an element of risk is considered. In playing the game both sanctioned and non-sanctioned behaviour may be utilised, as a leader may sanction behaviour of a non-sanctioned variety. Furthermore, political activity of a legitimate kind may be utilised to hide and/or legitimise non-sanctioned behaviours. It is the view of officers that being seen to be 'on message' is part of the game. The behaviour itself is ostensibly legitimate but its intent is clearly not.

In conclusion it is evident here that leaders and followers are engaged in a game comprising political activity; a game within which there are inevitably winners such as the Assistant Chief Executive and, regrettably, losers such as the ADS's chief officer. A dynamic within leader follower relationships is therefore the game, through which followers are able to develop their own follower position, are acknowledged by leaders and thrive.



**Part Three**  
**Discussion**

## **Chapter 11**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the complexity of the dynamics of the leader follower relationship identified in Chapters 6-11 and to explore the limitations of the study. This chapter therefore comprises two distinct sections.

#### **11.1 Leader follower dynamics**

It is the intention in this section to recap the dynamics uncovered in previous chapters and to draw conclusions from a critical theoretical perspective about how they influence each other in order to uncover an influence relationship that is distinct from normative/functional conceptualisations. This section concludes by asserting that the leader follower relationship as played out within the ABC is significantly focused on the use of political behaviour, to the extent that the influence relationship between leaders and followers referred to as leadership is political. This finding leads to wider conclusions concerning the nature of leadership as a politically constituted phenomenon.

It is recognised that in attempting to outline the dynamic processes between leaders and followers some of the complexity inherent within the relationship may be lost (Alvesson, 1996). The importance and significance of how the dynamics ebb and flow is dependent upon the actors involved, the experiences they bring to bear and factors contained within the wider environment. Nevertheless, a broader discussion of the dynamics is necessary and each dynamic needs to be considered in turn, specifically with reference to the themes of ambiguity, power and politics as developed within the critical theoretical literature.

Firstly, the dynamics of the 'wider environment' and 'organisational ambiguity' will be considered together as they both have a common theme related to the existence of a generally ambiguous environment within which leaders and followers relate to each other. Secondly, the dynamics of 'resource allocation and utilisation' and 'symbiosis' are discussed within a wider thematic framework of power relations within organisations. Finally, the third section discusses the interplay of politics from the perspective of 'playing the game' and 'political behaviour'. This section concludes by drawing together the various discussion points to state that this study has gone beyond the normative appreciation of leadership to provide an understanding of leadership in practice, a leadership that is centred on political behaviour.

### **11.1.1 Ambiguity and the leader follower relationship.**

The interpretations of the illustrations provided in chapters 6 and 7 assert that the organisation under study demonstrates high levels of ambiguity derived from a number of sources. It is the inherent levels of ambiguity within the wider environment and the organisation that have a powerful impact on the leader follower relationship, which is also shown to be ambiguously constructed.

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003b) maintain that issues related to ambiguity within leadership studies have rarely been considered and are therefore subject to neglect. The authors assert that a neglect of ambiguity has produced a level of theorising in which leadership is seen as something stable, coherent, and fixed. In applying ambiguity to the organisational setting, the authors demonstrate a number of problems related to the conceptualising of leadership as a real phenomenon leading to the conclusion that the existence of leadership is dependent upon numerous assumptions and should not be taken for granted.

Ambiguity is taken to refer to persistent uncertainty that cannot be diminished with more information. It has the capacity to create disarray and compromise the purity of leadership as a phenomenon (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b). In a study related to workers in a knowledge-intensive organisation Alvesson draws attention to the possibilities of heightened ambiguity (Alvesson, 2001). It is the contention here that the local government setting has much in common with the organisation in Alvesson and Sveningsson's study. Ambiguity in the public sector is further corroborated by additional studies, most notably Orr & Vince (2007) Pratchett and Wingfield ((1996) and Lee, Rainey and Chun (2009).

In common with Alvesson and Sveningsson's study, similar observations concerning levels of ambiguity were made during the current study. In the first instance the very notion of 'service' itself is ambiguous, as are the objectives related to the service and, finally, in the evaluation of the value of the service. What comprises a service as differentiated from an enterprise or 'arms length' organisation has consequences beyond pure semantics. As an example, the provision of car parking within the city came under increased focus, as this service possesses the capacity to generate huge amounts of cash. As a service, however, it was implied that revenue generation is of secondary importance to the provision of adequate parking for the benefit of the local business economy.

As the notion of service is ambiguous, so is the service objective. This source of ambiguity is exacerbated by the fact that targets are established in the belief that they facilitate better performance (Boyne & Chen, 2007) and are, therefore, almost exclusively established by external agencies, particularly the central government. Objectives for local

authorities and other public bodies have a tendency to be focused on service provision for areas related to deep-seated societal issues; problems for which the solutions are not immediately available, rendering the problem as 'wicked' as opposed to 'difficult' or 'tame', where the solutions are more immediate (Grint, 2005b). Whilst the destination is stated, the route to be taken is mostly through uncharted territory. Finally, ambiguity of service is additionally created by the evaluation of those services against the stated targets. Delivery of a target may be a quantifiable simplification of a problematic issue; the attainment of which has no impact on the problem at hand or creates additional related problems.

In addition to the three sources of ambiguity related to service, other sources are derived from the way the organisation is being forced to reform its methods of working and its structures. Many of the traditions and working practices of the public sector have been challenged by an extended period of functional reform inspired by the working practices of the private sector. The rapid encroachment of managerialism, as recognised by the new public management (Rhodes, 1991), has had the impact of changing the way in which public bodies view themselves and operate. A requirement to operate in two worlds that is typified, on the one hand, by consensus and, on the other, by free markets has created crisis within public bodies (Boyne & Chen, 2007); tensions that contribute to additional ambiguities within the workplace (Pandey & Wright, 2006). This is further exacerbated by the state of flux of the organisational structure, the impositions of concurrent delegation, the operating styles of the Directors and the ICC's involvement, amongst others.

It is the conclusions of this study that the above sources of ambiguity are evidence of a highly ambiguous organisation, and that these, combined with the ambiguity of leadership, impact on the very nature of leadership itself. It has been suggested that the solutions to 'wicked problems' and the effective transformation of public sector services can be found in the initiation and development of effective leadership practices (Bryman, 1996; P.I.U. 2001). Like the new public management the references for these normative leadership practices are those that have been drawn from the transformation of private sector enterprises. It is the contention of public stakeholder groups that these leadership characteristics would possess the same potency when applied to public sector organisations. Questions may be raised concerning the validity of the imposition of normative leadership models as there are a number of inter-related factors that suggest that leadership as conceptualised by neo-positivistic research methods does not stand up when subjected to critical scrutiny (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003b).

It has been shown that officers within the ABC are aware of leadership models and particularly those from a neo-charismatic perspective. It has also been indicated that officers are compelled to adopt and demonstrate leader behaviours outlined by these

models and, particularly, those developed by Bass and associates and incorporated by full range leadership theory (FRLT) (Avolio, 1991; Bass, 1998; Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994a, b). These compulsions are driven by the expectations of external stakeholder groups and the media who portray leadership as a demonstration of charismatic and heroic traits, allegedly symptomatic of leaders from neighbouring cities. Internally, respondents have confirmed their understandings of leadership as containing a strong visionary element in accordance with normative conceptualisations. This view has a strong corporate backing as shown by the 'From Good to Great' seminar and the shift in job focus of the Director group whose role has been 'elevated' to focus primarily on strategic direction and visioning.

This last point is significant and has been explored in studies by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a, 2003b). The authors conclude that whilst managers may entertain the possibility of performing leadership in a visionary guise, in practice, this remains elusive. Managers attempt to adhere to stated expectations with regard to leadership but fail to be either consistent in their approach or maintain their commitment for any substantial period of time as the consequence of other pressures referred to as micro management take over. Within the ABC, managers, and Directors in particular, have been reconstituted to be strategic and visionary – to demonstrate leadership. In practice, however, this is elusive, as it is impossible to resist becoming engaged in aspects of day-to-day management for which Directors retain accountability. Additional statements collected show that the aspirational claims to adopt leader postures decline and are replaced with cynicism about leadership, highlighting the initial statement as well-intentioned rhetoric

Alvesson and Sveningsson maintain that the concept of leadership, at least as expressed in its normative guise is underpinned by strong ideological overtones. This leads to the consideration that leadership in practice is neither part of the norm nor typical. The authors' study resonates heavily with those conducted by Calás and Smircich (1991) and Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich (1985), who focus on leadership as seduction and romance, and Gemmil and Oakley (1992) who see leadership as a potentially damaging, socially conspired myth.

The evidence from the ABC is in accord with the aforementioned studies and suggests that leadership in practice contradicts leadership as perceived. Whilst there is a prevailing organisational view about what comprises leadership the view is neither robust enough to withstand critical scrutiny or observation of practice. Evidence in favour of leadership is, however, almost exclusively expressed as leadership in the first person with little consideration for other leaders beyond an organisational requirement for greater leadership capacity. Open questioning of leadership theory as a fad by officers is at its most striking when the comments are related to following and the universal rejection of

the value of following. Scholars concur that leadership only exists where there are followers (Grint, 2005a; Kellerman, 2008) and an absence of mutually supportive followers would lead to the obvious conclusion that leadership in practice is absent.

An absence of leadership has been noted in other studies, which has led them to refer to “the good, the bad and the ugly” of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a p. 968). The good represents the aspiration, the bad the practice and the ugly the ambiguity that exists in the clear discord between managers’ conceptions of leadership (Good) and its practice (Bad).

Leadership-specific ‘ugly’ ambiguity is exacerbated by whom or what plays the leader role and has the capacity, therefore, to supply more sources of ambiguity in the leader follower relationship. The ‘what’ referred to in this case is central government, which has a profound effect on the organisation and the leader follower relationship as practised. A complex array of factors originating from central government’s reforming agenda has resulted in an extensive bureaucratic apparatus designed to monitor and investigate public sector performance against stated objectives and ensure internal compliance with process. It has been shown that this reduces the possibilities for leadership leaving only space for a derivative variant referred to here as ‘constricted leadership’ to be practised. This in part has been observed by others researching leadership within the public sector, where lack of leadership opportunity results in Chief Executives of public bodies acting purely as conduits to the politicised centre (Blackler, 2006).

This study has shown that the imposed bureaucratic apparatus of central government, comprised of commensurate levels of rules, regulation, process and procedures, is the leader in the relationship with the ABC. The authority of this leader follower relationship cascades throughout the organisation and, as the bureaucracy of central government is replicated, the ABC, because of its own historical anxieties, embellishes it. The result of this is that the leader follower relationship between central government and the ABC informs leaders and followers within the organisation, and relations are conducted in exclusively transactional terms contributing to the aforementioned constricted form of leadership being practised.

The authority of the central government’s leader position is hugely potent and influential as impositions on the ABC are virtually non-negotiable. Targets and processes are underpinned by the allocation of budget, which can be seen as Government’s primary transactional method of control (Lee et al, 2009). Whilst it may be possible to see the role of government and its impositions as all-encompassing, to assume that the ABC, as follower, acts in a purely compliant manner is incorrect. It is the follower’s reaction within what would ostensibly appear to be an autocratic, overtly transactional relationship that indicates ambiguity in two guises. The first is revealed in the responses of followers and

the second is in the relative mobility of the identity of leaders and followers. These, within a constricted leadership, further inform the ambiguous nature of the relationship between leaders and followers

It is theorised, particularly by the school of New Leadership, that followers are a typically compliant population. Leadership is seen as an asymmetrical influence relationship where followers are a blank slate upon which the leader writes the script (Jackson & Parry, 2008). Observations and conceptualisations that are more critical, derived from studies undertaken by Collinson conducted from a post-structuralist perspective, demonstrate that followers are not as compliant or homogenous a grouping as normative theorists maintain (Collinson, 1994, 2003, 2005, 2006). The studies show that followers, in response to anxieties created by organisational factors, are able to fulfil many different identities. Consequently, they become skilled at manipulating themselves and information, and have the capacity, therefore, to surprise leaders continually with their behaviours (Collinson, 2005).

It has been shown that the transactional relationship with the central government, underpinned by an extensive bureaucratic apparatus, establishes a particular form of social dominion (Morgan, 1997). It is the contention here that the relationship with central government (and other government funded external agencies) has the capacity to create anxieties in response to performance against objectives and processes. Failure in either capacity may result in facing heavy penalties and/or, in the case of personal failure, may be terminal as far as career is concerned. It has already been shown that a source of ambiguity may be derived from the problems associated with service evaluation and this has an iterative impact on followers. Ambiguity in evaluation results in anxiety related to performance, which escalates the manipulation of self and information. Successful performance is, to a greater extent, the result of impression management (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001), a skill that is essential for survival in an ambiguous public sector (Ferris et al, 2007). This, as a process, has been shown to fit the evidence observed in relation to the leader follower relationship between central government and the ABC but is equally relevant to those relationships played out within the ABC itself and gives rise to mobility of identity between leaders and followers.

The ABC has become skilled at fulfilling its follower obligations as far as central government is concerned. Its award of a four star status is testimony to this. However, in attaining this award, the officers of the ABC 'negotiated' their final award in a process that was reported to be quite aggressive at times. It is the contention of this study that, due to its relationship with central government and its rehearsed position of manipulating data from a follower perspective, officers of the authority are able to move from leader to follower status comfortably. One of the multiple identities available to followers is therefore 'Leader', thus diminishing the creditability of a theoretical relationship of

polarised individuals. The nature of the bureaucratic apparatus, embellished by the authority itself, requires that even the most senior leaders are required to act as followers on a regular basis; subsequently, following is more of a natural state for members of the ABC as opportunities to lead are rare and are associated with levels of risk due to the ambiguity of evaluation. Leaders/followers therefore can be appreciated as being in 'calculable followers' or 'informal leaders' states, that are in accordance to a hybrid of the two, with a slight element of bias dependent upon the situation the individual is faced with (Collinson, 2005). Subsequently, it is a finding of this study that, whilst the identities of followers are variable, the identities of leaders are not fixed either but are heavily dependent upon individual, task and context. This clearly has the capacity to create additional levels of ambiguity.

The possibilities for leadership in such an ambiguous environment appear to go beyond the conceptualising of normative leadership theory. Leadership, where it exists, is not stable and robust but is vague and contradictory. There is a dichotomy between leadership as a solution to the resolution of ambiguity when the imposition of leadership creates ambiguities itself.

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of Alvesson (1996) and Knights and Willmott (1992) concerning the importance of ambiguity in organisation studies. This study puts ambiguity at the heart of the leader follower relationship by concluding that the forces of ambiguity impinge upon the roles of leaders and followers alike. In support of Alvesson's study on leadership (Alvesson, 1996), this study provides empirical evidence which demonstrates that the normative guise of leadership is questionable.



### **11.1.2 Power and the leader follower relationship.**

The interpretations of the illustrations in chapters 7 and 8 provided dynamics related to the 'utilisation and acquisition of resources' and the 'symbiosis' of leaders and followers. Both these dynamics refer directly and indirectly with the interplay of power and its effects on the leader follower relationship.

Normative representations of leadership are typically presented in binary terms. Leaders and followers appear at opposite ends of an influence relationship where leaders are predominantly given voice and followers are rendered silent. Hence, mainstream leadership theories that prioritise leaders have assumed that leaders are powerful whilst followers are largely powerless. Similarly, such orthodox studies portray power and control as rational forms of organisational authority whilst resistance is viewed as abnormal. Where power is considered it is generally conceived narrowly, either as positive, where leaders empower followers, or negatively as a form of coercion (Collinson, 2005). A lack of appreciation of the element of power within the leader follower relationship has led to calls for the development of models that treat power and subjectivity as integral to the leader follower relationship (Knights & Willmott, 1992).

Leadership is rarely viewed as a form of managerial behaviour toward subordinates but as a relationship reflecting harmony and a convergence of interest, and involving, therefore, little or no power or coercion. Indeed Rost (1993) defines leadership as an influence relationship conducted without coercion toward the attainment of mutually agreed aims. Coercive behaviour and the use of formal authority to establish rewards or punishments are predominantly appreciated as the activities of managers only. It is difficult, however, to imagine a relationship between leader and followers where an element of formal authority is not present. Full range leadership theory, in common with many of the models of the New Leadership approach, does incorporate aspects of power within it in the form of transactional leadership (Avolio, 1991; Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994a; Burns, 1978). This dimension of the model is heavily redolent of management relying upon such Leader/manager behaviours as correction, negative feedback, reproof, sanctions or disciplinary action (Bass, 2000).

The findings of Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003a, 2003b), demonstrated also in this study, show that whilst managers may aspire to act as leaders they rarely achieve their ambition. In its place managers rely on 'bad' management which is closely associated with detail and operations. Given the problems of pursuing good management/leadership the value of transactionalism appears to have been overlooked in models of leadership (Rickards & Clark, 2006). This creates a number of problems for leadership scholars and, specifically, those advocating neo-charismatic models of leadership, as they fail to account for the obvious management behaviours that are only possible where the leader

holds and utilises the power of the superordinate position. The oversight regarding the prevalence and importance of transactional behaviour has led scholars to claim that power and the asymmetries of the relationship should not be underestimated (Collinson, 2005).

In the previous section the nature of the relationship between the ABC and central government was expressed as one that is based on overt transactionalism, predominantly concerning budget (Lee et al. 2009). Evidence has also been presented to show that the acquisition of and the utilisation of additional resources is a core dynamic of the leader follower relationship of which budget is the principal resource. Budget as a resource is important, and the element of budget that remains discretionary is of paramount value. Discretionary budget allows for the further acquisition of additional resources beyond the non-discretionary element, as this is already earmarked for the continuance of operations. It should be noted that resources refer to not only financial resources but to other resources that are material – staff, office space, technology and symbolic resources such as title, access, privilege, status. It has also been noted that the overt, transactionally ordered relationship between the ABC and central government acts as an exemplar method for others and, consequently, the relationship is replicated through the organisation. It is the conclusion of this study that leaders and followers base their transactional relationship on the acquisition of resources as additional resources equate to increased levels of authority and power.

Generally, those in leader positions hold superior positions within the organisation's structure and this provides the basis within normative studies for assumptions concerning the asymmetrical power relationship between leaders and followers; leaders hold power, followers do not. From a critical perspective, however, these assumptions are less clear than the dualistic perspective alluded to above. Problems occur when power is conceptualised as a possession, as opposed to a social relation, in that the former perspective diverts focus from the interdependence of social relations (Knights & Willmott, 1992).

A small number of critical leadership studies are concerned with the importance of power. Smircich and Morgan (1982) demonstrate how leaders maintain control by 'managing meaning' and define situations to meet their own designs. The authors conclude that leaders can create situations in which followers are rendered helpless by powerlessness and, therefore, surrender their own autonomy. Calás and Smircich (1991) contend that leaders 'seduce' followers, whilst Gemmill and Oakley (1992) maintain that leaders produce learned helplessness. These studies show how power is an intrinsic part of the leader follower relationship but, by concentrating on the assumed powerful (leaders), they underestimate the potential of follower agency and fail to consider that meaning is co-

constructed and that power relations are interdependent (Collinson, 2005); more will be said on this later.

It is the contention here that the 'possession' of power over resources invested in leader positions cannot be sustained without the shared interpretations of less powerful others (followers). The meanings that sustain power relations have to be negotiated in the first place and need to be continually negotiated, as power cannot be stored, and does not exist independently of its exercise. The importance of this insight is that it highlights the importance of the practice and negotiation of leadership. To this end, power is integral to the dynamic social practice of leadership (Knights & Willmott, 1992).

Leader power and its correlation to control is a well-reported phenomenon and this study confirms the requirement of and the engagement of leaders in managing power in order to maintain their own position within the organisational structure. In achieving this, leaders are able to exploit ambiguity held within the environment in order to increase their own access to additional resources, thereby developing power or protecting their own power sources. The example of the establishment of the Public Private Partnership Unit (PPPU) business is an example of an individual doing exactly this to produce millions of pounds in revenue but to the detriment of the internal Architecture and Design Service. This occurrence is the only example of its type contained within the empirical materials but other examples were discussed during the course of the fieldwork. It is evident that as the environment possesses many different sources of ambiguity, as outlined in the previous section, the opportunity for leaders to exploit ambiguity is extensive and has become institutionalised.

For leaders a significant part of the power relationship with followers is the negotiation of position and identity. Leaders and followers reconstitute their identities as 'leader' and 'follower' on a continual basis given the ambiguities inherent within the environment, the organisation and the leader follower relationship. As stated earlier, leaders require followers (Grint, 2005b; Kellerman, 2008). The absence of followers, given the ideological significance of the value of leadership, would therefore severely prejudice the continuance of the individual as a leader. This insight further illuminates the leader/control relationship. Leaders may strive for greater control but there is no definitive regulatory process that gifts to leaders exclusivity of the power mechanisms that maintain control. The concept of utilising power in order to gain control in an ambiguous environment means that control is never absolute. Similarly, the 'powerless' feel no such compulsion to submit to leader designs. The concept of leaders requiring followers demands that following has a proportionate value in the sum of the relationship.

Mumby (2005) observes that, despite a growing literature, many studies prefer to dichotomise power and resistance as being at a complete binary opposition that

privileges either control or resistance. This approach asserts leader control to the detriment of follower agency. This study demonstrates categorically that followers do not follow blindly but are capable of their own designs and of establishing independent agency toward their own objectives.

The issue of followership has been one of contention within leadership studies. Many studies show followership to be the natural consequence of followers responding to the charismatic/transformational behaviours of leaders. Rost (1993) maintains that in the act of following, followers do not engage in any followership but are a complicit part of the leader follower relationship. Followers can not engage in followership, therefore, but participate fully in the leadership relationship. Explicit, however, within Rost's definition of leadership is that leaders and followers agree mutual aims. This, although possible, is unlikely given firstly, the ambiguity of the relationship; secondly, the transactional nature of leadership and, finally, the agency of followers. Followership in this study refers to independent associated actions that followers are capable of, and may include resistance.

In order to achieve a level of independent agency followers must be able to attain levels of power for their own uses, and this is clearly evident within the ABC. On a formal basis, followers are able to mobilise employment law protection which, due to the nature of the public sector and its associated levels of accountability and transparency, is relatively robust in comparison to other types of organisation. Accounts of grievances and 'whistle-blowing' are not uncommon within the organisation. These forms of resistance are made more possible by the protections that are afforded by high levels and traditions of unionisation, as the union has a long history of resistance practice and is adept at representing the views of the 'non-powerful'. During the fieldwork, a number of 'disputes' were current and in the process of being negotiated. On a less formal basis, followers have designed a range of tactics, which have the capacity to impede the plans of leaders. As an example of this is the informal conversation with the outgoing leader of the authority during which he referred to the levels of frustrations he had experienced. This indicates that leaders are not able to acquire total control, as followers possess a level of power that makes possible their own agency that has the capacity to diminish leader agency.

In addition to this, followers have their own sources of power within the organisation. Critical studies look to both material and symbolic forms of resistance. A list of categories of resistance that is comprehensive but not exhaustive has been compiled by Zoller and Fairhurst (2007) and includes such action as ambivalence, resignation, toleration, theft, non-cooperation, sabotage, confrontation, collective action, formal complaints, legal action, or violence, and all are applicable to the ABC.

With reference to the transactional negotiations ongoing within the leader follower relationship, it is important that the reward of resources matches the expectations of the follower. Where there is a discrepancy in the perceived value of the resource reward, following may be withdrawn. Leaders for their part are aware of the fragility of their own status and will make overtures to followers in order to secure their support. This observance is not limited to the formal leader follower dyad. Followers gain plenty of exposure and opportunity throughout the organisation in the forms of working parties, focus groups, cross-departmental working, multi-agency initiatives and equality approaches to align themselves with leaders that are capable of matching the expectations of the follower.

In the case of the ABC, the two, most prominent power bases within the authority are the elected Members, specifically the Executive Committee and the corporate centre of the Chief Executive's Unit. The possibilities of aligning oneself with either one of these groups allow the individual the opportunity to acquire considerable resources, both material and symbolic. The result of satisfactory exposure to one of these groups may well mean accelerated promotion through the ranks and it is the prospect of advancement that fulfils the criteria of the optimum contingent reward bestowed by leaders. It is important to note, however, that this reward is not limited to the gift of immediate superordinate manager or formal leader, and evidence has been provided of leaders undertaking actions, effectively, to transfer competent followers away from colleagues.

Followers have become adept at a whole host of activities that may be utilised to frustrate the designs of leaders, which in the context of the organisation may be regarded as resistance. In the case of followers, being concerned with potential penalties and sanctions may result in more subversive or covert forms of dissent. Absenteeism was particularly noted, as was exploitation of flexible working practices. Increases in the awareness and competence of manipulating sophisticated forms of technology provide the opportunity for more covert but deeply subversive forms of dissent. By far the most common form of covert dissent witnessed, however, was the form of reliance upon procedure to slow, stifle, halt or reject leader plans and initiatives. This allows more junior officers to accommodate senior officers or elected officials whilst simultaneously concealing their own dissent and acquiring a degree of control. This is particularly relevant where certain officers or groups of officers have specific technical knowledge related to engineering, legislation or process.

The above, however, appears to demonstrate a lack of coherence in the behaviours of followers. On the one hand, they will align themselves to leader designs and, on the other, they are capable of resisting leader overtures in order to locate other leaders that have greater capacity to reward following behaviour. Post-structural analysis of follower relations demonstrates that followers are able to display multiple follower identities or

social selves whose actions need to be understood as a consequence of the complex and ambiguous circumstances apparent at the time (Collinson, 2006), allowing followers to engage in behaviours that appear to be inconsistent, contrary and surprising to leaders (Collinson, 2005).

As with issues related to power and control it would be wrong to assume that only followers perform resistance. It has already been demonstrated that significant ambiguity is held in the positions of 'leader' and 'follower' and in the leader follower relationship itself. Collinson's view of multiple selves can be extended to incorporate another 'social-self', that of leader/follower or follower/leader dependent upon circumstance. This has been referred to earlier as a 'calculable follower' or 'informal leader' (Collinson, 2005) and occurs when the status of the actor is not clear. As an example, a Director in a meeting with the Leader of Council acts as leader to the department and as follower to the position of the council. In deflecting the instructions of the Leader, the Director engages in a particular form of leadership recognised by Zoller and Fairhurst (2007) as 'resistance leadership' or observance by being both consenting and dissenting at the same time (Iedema et al, 2006).

In showing that control does not reside exclusively with the leader group and that followers are able to travel a path of their own volition in pursuit of their own objectives, it is important to remember that as leader-centric models of leadership have privileged the leader, so follower-centric models should not over-privilege the follower. As leadership has been shown to have romantic connotations (Meindl et al, 1985) scholars should resist the temptation to romanticise the resistant follower. The relationship between the two is symbiotic; leaders and followers negotiate together for a variety of reasons.

The underlying consensus between leaders and followers should not be assumed to be the product of 'effective leadership' bringing together a variety of disparate identities to form what has been referred to as a "committed polity" (Knights & Willmott, 1992 p.766). It is more insightful to appreciate the consent between leaders and followers as precarious, achieved through the exercise of power. The development of shared meaning and joint processes is mediated by relations of power attained through differential access to material and symbolic resources.

Senior ranked officers are subject to almost continual monitoring aimed at making them more accountable to various external stakeholders. In addition, the ABC has embellished the externally imposed bureaucratic apparatus so that new forms of control processes significantly affect individual identities. In response to such surveillances and the ambiguities of leader follower identities particularly evident within public sector bodies, leaders and followers consent both to resist control mechanisms and acquire more sources of power. Rather than be appreciated as polarised extremes, as with control and

resistance, dissent and consent may be shown to be ineluctably linked within the same ambiguous practices of leadership.

### 11.1.3 Politics and the leader follower relationship.

The illustrations and interpretations contained in chapters 10 and 11 are concerned with the occurrence of political activity and gamesmanship within the ABC. It is maintained here that both these dynamics are independent and contribute specific dynamics to the leader follower relationship. They are nevertheless two sides to the same political coin. This section therefore focuses on the observations of political activity in the ABC and its impacts on the leader follower relationship.

There is an underlying assumption that the importance of political behaviour in organisational functioning has become more generally recognised in recent years (Ammeter et al, 2002; Mintzberg, 1985; Pandey & Wright, 2006; Pfeffer, 1981; Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001), and so there would appear to be a general consensus concerning the presence of political behaviour in organisations. The rationale for an upturn in the importance of political behaviour appears to be connected to a concerted increase in the competitive nature of business. This observed tendency can be drawn from the interpretations of Pfeffer (1981) in which interdependence, heterogeneous goals and beliefs, and the scarcity and distribution of power, increase the use of politics in organisations (Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001). From a more practical perspective some authors conclude that political skill is a prerequisite for organisational survival (Ferris et al, 2007).

Mintzberg forwards the view that organisations can be appreciated as political arenas (Mintzberg, 1985), a view shared by a number of academics in the field (Ammeter et al, 2002). In such political arenas, the amount of political activity in evidence is correlated to levels of conflict within the organisation. In such cases, the more conflict there is the more likely political behaviour will be undertaken. This is clearly a destructive process, as Mintzberg maintains, "*The purpose of an organisation is to produce goods and services, not to provide an arena in which people fight each other*" (Mintzberg, 1985 p.148). Despite this, however, the author concedes that politics within a political arena may deliver organisational benefits and should be judged by its long-term effects on the organisation's ability to deliver the mission(s).

Mintzberg (1985) sees politics as representative of one of a number of influence systems within an organisation. Among other potential systems is the system of authority that defines formal power allocated on an explicit and legally sanctioned basis. The system of ideology, although implicit, typically represents the norms and beliefs widely held in the organisation, and the system of expertise represents power that is certified on an official basis and is sanctioned by a formal authority. A system of politics may be seen as reflecting power, which is technically illegitimate. In other words, political behaviour is neither formally authorised nor widely accepted or officially sanctioned

Mintzberg associates the source of politics directly with conflict in the organisation. He



defines a political arena as a function of conflict and has created subcategories of arena depending on the intensity and distribution of conflict within the organisation. Conflict, as such, is not clearly defined but the study associates political behaviour further with political games, and these give an indication as to how conflict is being conceptualised.

The outlined games are 'played' out between individuals and groups of individuals against other individuals or groups of individuals. The descriptors of the games coalesce around a rationale of establishing power bases which is the underlying reason for organisational conflict. In such cases political activity comprises a range of overlapping activities but is guided by rules both implicit and explicit – the collection of rules, in effect, defines the game. The game is seen as a concrete mechanism in which workers regulate and structure their power relations. Games are, therefore, instruments toward organised action. Engaging in political games defines who the 'competitors' are, removes weaker competitors from the field and serves as a test to demonstrate the potential for leadership (Mintzberg, 1985).

Mintzberg's contention is that conflict is predominantly detrimental to organisational functioning - political behaviour is,

*"...typically divisive and conflictive, often pitting individuals or groups against formal authority, accepted ideology, and/or certified expertise, or else against each other..."*

**Mintzberg, (1985 p.134)**

Consequently, the eradication or containment of conflict allows that the organisation will be able to function more efficiently.

This appears to be a simplification of the issues of conflict in organisation. Morgan (1997) states that conflicts arise when interests collide and establishes the basis of conflict as disparity of interest over power. Collinson (2005) draws upon Foucault's interpretations to state that where there is power there will be resistance to it and, hence, politics will arise where there is a diversity of interest making the eradication of conflict futile as the mere attempt to control and maintain will produce resistance against the controlling actions.

Critical theoretical commentators operate from within an ideological-political spectrum and so the volume and existence of political behaviour in organisations, therefore, is to be expected (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2005). Political activity can be seen as being inextricably linked to the maintenance and/or undermining of existing power structures; equally, it is the pervasiveness of micro-politics that leads to the politicisation of everyday life (Layder, 1994). Subsequently, a definition of political activity that favours one end of a polarised continuum lacks creditability. Politics exists in organisations and within the prevailing power structures. Political activity has the capacity to be both a positive and negative influencer of organisational life. A critical view of politics in organisations would

concur with the commentators above as to its occurrence but would differ in terms of its interpretations, particularly within an influence relationship such as leadership.

The widespread appreciation of political behaviour stands alongside a similar appreciation of the value of organisational leadership. Given that social psychologists have extensively studied power and influence processes in organisations, and that most commentators of organisational studies admit that political behaviours are often a necessary part of organisational functioning and can have profound effects on those exercising them and the effectiveness of organisations, it is surprising therefore that there is little consideration of politics within leadership studies (House & Aditya, 1997 p.455).

Some of the writers above make close reference to leadership in their assertions about politics. As an example, Mintzberg refers to the games played as a training ground to identify potential leaders. Additionally, the author suggests that a test for 'good' politics is the long-term effect the politics has on the organisation's mission. Clearly in making these statements, the author is referring to a neo-charismatic type of normative leadership in which heroic leaders claim their position after winning at games in order to lead followers in pursuit of mission and visions.

An additional contribution drawn from the study by Mintzberg requires further evaluation from a critical point of view. In asserting that politics may be one of a number of systems of influence, neither formally authorised nor widely accepted, or officially certified, Mintzberg directs attention toward the system of ideology held by the organisation that represents the norms and values of the organisation. It is a contention here that leadership, in its normative sense, comprises part of the system of ideologies of an organisation that is formally authorised, widely accepted and officially certified and is, therefore, seen as the virtual opposite of politics as a system of influence.

Ammeter et al (2002), in a study specifically detailing political activity in leadership, define political activity as central to the constructive management of shared meaning. This definition sees political activity as a neutral but inherently necessary activity of organisational functioning. However, the authors agree that political behaviour has the capacity to be representative of the dark side of management and prefer to focus on political activities that are deemed to be altruistic and, consequently, benefit the greater collective or organisation. The authors therefore align political activity alongside the constructive management of shared meaning.

The management of meaning implies the creation of meaning where it does not exist and, consequently, is a vital mechanism for dealing with ambiguity within the organisation, providing clarity in terms of the visions and associated plans of the leader. The authors state,

*"Hence, many self-serving behaviours that are functional for an individual*

*may be dysfunctional for the group and/or organisation. Although such behaviours may serve to protect the individual's reputation and interests, such outcomes are often achieved at the expense of the organisation's best interests. To us, such instances of self-serving behaviour do not constitute leadership"*

**Ammeter et al, (2002 p.767).**

The attainment or maintenance of control is accomplished through continuing to hold disproportionate levels of power over the non-powerful. It is dangerous, and somewhat naïve, to assume that this is only achieved through legitimate or sanctioned behaviour. Control may be achieved through political behaviour that is not self-serving but, equally, it may be attained through behaviour that clearly is.

In citing the study by Smircich and Morgan (1982) the authors should be aware that the writers of the study equate the management of meaning with a management strategy of maintaining control. From a critical perspective, the management of meaning privileges the views of managers/leaders – the powerful over the non-powerful thus reinforces the status quo of the organisation's power structures through the legitimised vehicle of organisational leadership. Furthermore, it continues to assert the importance and value of leadership. The consequence of this form of iterative process of supplying meaning and asserting its own value eventually develops a state of learned helplessness as outlined by Gemmill and Oakley (1992).

Furthermore, they show that studies on political behaviour are predominantly focused on the top levels of the organisational hierarchy. Firstly, this suggests that political skill is a prerequisite for organisational success, a view shared by other authors (Ferris et al, 2007) and, secondly, this would appear to suggest that political activity is limited to leaders only. This view of political activity occurring at higher levels of the organisation does not fit the observations and interpretations of this study. Diversity of interest and imbalances in power require followers to engage in political activity. To explain the observation made by Ammeter a number of factors may be considered. Firstly, the majority of leadership studies are conducted on the top teams of organisations. The observation of greater levels of politicking will be as a consequence therefore of the general disregard for study on followers. Secondly, political activity conducted by members of the top levels of the organisation is more likely to be legitimised whereas any political behaviour by followers is more likely to be pejoratively categorised as dissent and resistance. Thirdly, due to the intended target of the political activity and the possible risk of sanction it is more probable that such activity as conducted by followers will be covert and, therefore, less obvious. Finally, political will and political skill is linked to career advancement (Ferris et al, 2007), those at the top of the organisation structure are by association the most skilled proponents of political activity.

The political is rarely considered in critical theorising of leadership possibly as preferences are for an appreciation of deep power structures over relational perspectives (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). Where this has been attempted, however, the phenomenon is considered beyond the functional and is taken into the political realm associated with power and control effects. The privileging of leaders in asymmetrical relationships similarly takes no account of the agency of followers, who are capable of manipulating their own identities and information and are able, therefore, to engage in political activity and exploit ambiguity in pursuit of their own goals.

In using the empirical material in order to explore the motivation of leaders and followers when practicing in political activity it is possible to make explicit the use of politics as a method of gaining control and attaining power (resources). It has been shown that leaders of public sector organisations can be seen as a conduit for a political centre (Blackler, 2006). This in turn constricts the possibilities for leadership internally as the bureaucratic apparatus of government significantly reduces any bureaucratic discretion (Van Wart, 2003). It has already been shown that budget can be used as a measure of control (Lee et al, 2009) and, therefore, has value as the primary resource as a source of power. Leaders of public sector organisations (followers of the central authority) utilise their political skills, therefore, in attempts to gain more budget. Subsequently, leaders will practice various forms of impression management activity and enhance this with campaigns of coalition building, networking and lobbying. As has been asserted earlier, this example of behaviour is copied by politically motivated senior managers who compete for those resources available, material and symbolic. Through these actions, leaders maintain their positions within the organisational hierarchy.

As leaders use impression management and lobbying to gain resources, followers utilise political activity and the same tactics for similar reasons. Specific to their cause is the engagement in transactional negotiations to gain reward in the form of more resources or advancement. Followers will align themselves with leaders who are able to deliver the followers' expectations of reward. Where there is an imbalance between expectations, and the reward offered, followers withdraw their support by utilising forms of covert dissent, which may have the effect of damaging the impression built by leaders. Furthermore, in building alliances and coalitions with powerful leaders, followers are able to protect themselves from others and their attempts to liberate resources.

Leaders and followers negotiate their position within a framework of available resources which credits the individuals involved with associated levels of power in terms of resources held. Leaders need followers, firstly, as a resource and, secondly, as the primary method for realising the value and utilising the resources held. Followers need leaders because of the opportunities they make available in resources and career advancement. Additionally leaders and followers engage in political activity to deal with

the ambiguity involved in the relationship, the relative position held as 'leader' or 'follower', and in the evaluation of the services. Public sector ethos (PSE), defined elsewhere as a political institution, provided a coping mechanism for ambiguity under consensual methods of working (Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). A more aggressive functional managerialism observed as part of the new public management has eroded the PSE leaving in its place greater ambiguity as managers attempt to create consent through rhetorical recourse to visions and missions, and, as stated before, ambiguity provides opportunities for leaders and followers to fulfil their own objectives.

In acting on these motives and others, leaders and followers will use political activity that is both sanctioned and non-sanctioned. Non-sanctioned political activity is seen within this study as 'playing the game'. Mintzberg describes political games as being played with an explicit or implicit set of rules, which does not preclude the use of non-sanctioned political activity. Morgan defines gamesmanship as follows,

*"The organizational game player comes in many forms. Sometimes, he is reckless and ruthless, 'shooting from the hip' engaging in boardroom brawls, and never missing an opportunity to intimidate others."*

**Morgan, (1997 p.190)**

This makes a very clear statement about the possibilities of non-sanctioned political behaviour being utilised. It is a finding of this study, however, that either a follower or a leader in the pursuit of some objective may employ gamesmanship. Where undertaken by the follower it is done because in all likelihood the behaviour will become legitimised and sanctioned by the leader(s) over time. As such, the rules of playing a game and gamesmanship are a product of the organisation's own history. In order to illustrate this, the example provided in Chapter 10 is repeated here, but interpreted from a political perspective.

In this example, the officer establishes a new initiative and is motivated by the power resources it will attract. This is political behaviour that is non-sanctioned but is undertaken in the full knowledge of the Deputy Chief Executive who would be aware of the damage such action is likely to impart on the Architect and Design Service. The behaviour has become sanctioned and therefore legitimised by the leader. The follower has initially acted independently and has actively sought a leader in achieving his own aims. Leader and follower are acting as part of a designed plan, transactionally negotiated. They have been able to dovetail their aims into those stipulated by central government, and this gives the actions further legitimacy. The new enterprise will be located in the Chief Executive's Unit close to the corporate and political power bases of the ADS. The transactional basis of this and the contingent rewards for the officers are, therefore, transparent. The officer of the PPPU has exploited central government directives and the

associated ambiguity inherent in the internal workings of the authority for his benefit and, ostensibly, the benefit of the organisation. The officer of the PPPU took a risk and played the game, the ADS chief officer lost. To be resolved in this example are the reasons why the ADS chief officer lost out so badly. This will remain conjecture but it is possible to surmise that once the issue was raised at CLT, the ADS became a drain on resources and, therefore, the power yielded by the Director lessened. The chief officer lost his/her political ally and no other ally could be found; the chief officer was rendered powerless. Time dictated that, eventually, a face-saving solution could be found and that was to offer early retirement.

## **11.2 Politics and leadership**

It is no real surprise that within a political arena, given its propensity to attract people with the will to act politically such as the organisation under study, that an extensive amount of political activity is observable. It is, then again, not too much of a 'leap of imagination' to suggest that extensive levels of politics within an organisation will filter through its levels to impact upon its basic administrative, managerial and leadership functions.

The previous sections of this chapter have shown how an interdependent relationship exists between ambiguity power/control and politics. It has also been remarked upon that it is a surprise that there have been no substantive attempts to make provision for political activity in a theoretical interpretation of leadership, and where this has been attempted it is usually set within the parameters of existing normative understandings of the phenomenon. It is a conclusion of this study that these theories provide a 'politicised' theory of leadership and are deficient in stating the true contribution of politics in the leader follower relationship.

This section comprises two parts. The first deals with the deficiencies of politicised leadership models and the second draws the arguments together to make the substantive conclusion of this study – that the characteristics of leadership as a phenomenon can be interpreted as a politically constructed influence relationship. This has significant impact on our understanding of the nature of leadership as this study demonstrates that politics corresponds with leadership.

### **11.2.1 The treatment of politics in leadership studies**

Leadership as conceptualised from a functional perspective has not made a serious attempt to incorporate an appreciation of politics into its theoretical models. More recently, studies have been developed to attempt this, yet they have not taken the full implications of politics into consideration. It is considered here that the models are deficient for the following reasons.

Firstly, the limited incorporation of sanctioned politics in the models of Ammeter and colleagues (2002) portrays only a part of possible political behaviour. The authors have deliberately neglected the inclusion of non-sanctioned political behaviour and gamesmanship predominantly because the motives of usage do not subscribe to the definition of leadership as conceptualised by the authors. In ignoring a significant proportion of possible political behaviours, they alter the motivations of actors and limit the credibility of the theoretical models subsequently derived. Leadership as an influence relationship takes part between leaders and followers. Therefore, whatever the form of the make-up of the influence relationship, it comprises leadership, no matter how distasteful. In addition, by including a proportion of political behaviours and excluding the rest, their study appears to add substantially more ambiguity into an already ambiguous

relationship. Part of the malaise of leadership studies, as reported in Chapter 2, is as a consequence of definitional shortcomings (Rost, 1993). Leadership studies, in promoting leadership as a powerful transformative force on the one hand, cannot turn a blind eye when faced with the acts of destructive leaders on the other by resorting to claims that one is as a result of leaders whilst the other is the result of 'power wielders'. Subsequently, leadership research serves to perpetuate the sanctity of leadership as a construct, which merely serves to compound the issue related to what leadership academics have to say about leadership practices.

Secondly, in those studies that attempt an investigation into politics and leadership, they appear reluctant to go beyond their own narrative to draw conclusions contained within their studies. Ferris et al (2007) remark in their study on the similarities between charisma and political skill but insist on maintaining the integrity of the two constructs. Other studies, such as the frequently cited and influential study by Mintzberg (1985), state that political games are the proving ground and, consequently, a developmental programme for leaders. The study by Ammeter strips away the antecedents and the consequences of politics by asserting that,

*"...we hoped to depict that politics are simply a fact of life in organizations, and demonstrate how leaders need to work on and through others to accomplish personal and organizational goals."*

**Ammeter et al, (2002 p.788)**

A ready association between leadership and politics is apparent in the literature and yet the implications of the association are never theorised and the construct's independence of the leadership phenomenon remains unchallenged.

Finally, the sanctity of leadership as a construct is maintained by the ideological foundation of the phenomenon. A determination to produce a leadership that is easily assimilable for a ready public is not representative of empirical evidence. A critical appreciation of leadership suggests that there are wider and deeper structures inherent within the leader follower relationship that remain unexplored. The ambiguity of the leader follower relationship in terms of constitution and practice has been negated by an apparently socially constructed need to believe in the value of leaders and what they practice. Establishing the ideological position of the value of leadership demands that possible alternatives are opposed without considering that the very act of opposing these alternatives is an act of control that reduces the genuine possibility of transformation (emancipation).

### **11.2.2 Appreciating politics as leadership**

In the second section, arguments are made that illustrate a correspondence between leadership theory and politics. These can be extended to conclude that there is a direct



correspondence between leadership and political behaviour. In demonstrating this, the full range leadership theory model<sup>8</sup> (Avolio, 1991; Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994a), as the apex of the neo-charismatic appreciation of leadership, will be used to show how its component parts can be reinterpreted from a political perspective to demonstrate a clear correspondence between the two concepts. The model is comprised of two parts – transformational leadership and transactional leadership. In reinterpreting the model each component element of the two parts will be considered in turn.

### Transformational Leadership

#### Idealised Influence or Charisma

Ferris and colleagues (2007) have already noted the close association between politics and this component part of transformational leadership. If the ability to inspire people to action toward an articulated vision or set of mutually reinforcing and integrative goals is what is generally meant by charisma, then charisma and political skill would appear to be quite closely related. Bass and Avolio (1994b) consider the construct to be more akin to establishing oneself as possessing referent power and setting a behavioural example.

From a political perspective, this appears to correspond directly to impression management engaged, not least, due to the possible ambiguities inherent in evaluating the success of work undertaken. Impression management requires leaders to build an aura, supported by followers of their capability, and success, either material or symbolic. From a practical perspective, leaders attempt to establish favourable impressions through reliance on rhetoric about visions and missions whilst inwardly aspiring to be leader-like, yet practicing micro management and exploiting ambiguity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a).

#### Intellectual Stimulation

This is seen by Bass and Avolio (1994b) as providing encouragement to break with the past and establish new ways of doing things. From a political perspective this construct corresponds to generating appeal for a superordinate initiative such as promoting a compelling vision, in all likelihood the vision of a leader. In achieving this, ambiguity in the organisation may be used by the leader to prevent unpopular but promising alternatives from being prematurely eliminated. Additionally, of course, the leader may also be able to use ambiguity to promote a favoured course of action over other potential alternatives.

#### Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation is seen by Bass & Avolio (1994b) as potentially overlapping with idealised influence or charisma. The leader provides simplified and symbolic emotional

---

<sup>8</sup> See figure 2.1. Chapter 2, p.32 for a graphical representation

appeals in support of the goals. Symbolic associations and displays of authority and power would correspond with inspirational motivation. The use of internal corporate promotions such as 'From Good to Great' may be an example of the type of political activity associated here, as may be the use of external agencies and, particularly, where well-known individuals or celebrities are used, in support of initiatives. More powerful is the symbolism involved in rhetoric when engaging individuals in a compelling future related to an initiative, event or vision. Problems will arise in the building of consensus concerning the vision. Inevitably, some groups or individual followers will be adversely impacted by the proposed changes and will react accordingly. In such cases, the leader may utilise coalition building skills.

#### Individualised Consideration

In the full range leadership theory model, followers are treated individually but with equanimity to meet the needs and requirements of the follower. Assignments may be delegated to provide learning opportunities. This component part of leadership corresponds well to the political skill of interpersonal influence of making the individual appear important. The leader, then, is required to individualise their approach and convince the followers of the course of action. In doing this, of course, the leader may choose to resort to transactional tactics.

During the study, transformational behaviours were not commonly observed. The various parts of transformational leadership coalesce into a conceptual singularity related to vision promotion and impression management. Furthermore, other academics have noted that managers aspire to be visionary or leader-like but fail in their aspirations (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a). Aspirational leadership is replaced by a focus on day-to-day management activities which has the capacity to promote more ambiguity; this may be utilised by the manager in promoting a particular vision.

#### Transactional Leadership

##### Contingent Reward

This part of the model rewards followers for attainment of performance targets. The key responsibility of the leader is to clarify the direction or participate in what the follower needs to do. Corresponding to this from a political perspective are the rewards given to followers for continued support; providing that the rewards meet expectations the follower will engage in the objectives of the relationship. This is a principal mechanism for establishing control of and gaining consent from the follower group, and is particularly effective in impression management. The rewards referred to primarily involve access to additional resources, either material or symbolic, with the most effective contingent reward being related to advancement and/or the opportunities for advancement. Where

there is a gap in expectation the follower will resist, most probably in a covert way, given the potential sanctions enforceable by the senior manager.

#### Management by Exception

This part of a model may involve active or passive behaviours. These are varying tactics related to the direct involvement of the leader in resolving issues related to performance and failing to meet expectation. Management by exception is the clearest opportunity for the leader to engage in political behaviours that may be considered non-sanctioned. Management of performance can be tackled through the formal bureaucratic apparatus or, alternatively, through more overt behaviours such as the use of intimidation and innuendo. The choice for the leader is dependent upon the effect of the failure in performance. Should this result in exposing an impression carefully nurtured and protected by the leader, it is more likely the leader will attempt to bring about the removal of the follower. In this way, the politically capable leader practices discretion based upon follower capabilities. The use of discretion is absent in the models of neo-charismatic theorising and appears contradictory to the aforementioned transformational behaviours such as individualised consideration. Whilst the use of discriminatory tactics may not comply with leadership theory, it is entirely congruent with a political theory of leadership.

#### Laissez Faire

This is a sub-behaviour of management by exception where the leader takes no action in the face of performance issues. The precise formulation of this sub-factor has not been fully conceptualised in leadership models (Rickards & Clark, 2006) but can be appreciated as politically motivated activity, as the leader is utilising his/her powerful position to take the time to consider the possible actions available.

This study has shown the fragility of transformational leadership behaviours and has highlighted the use of transactionally negotiated agreements between leaders and followers in pursuit of their objectives. By way of conclusion, however, it is asserted that the political behaviours as part of leader follower relations as detailed above are predominantly those derived from a leadership perspective. Followers, whilst less powerful, are not powerless in response to leader behaviours and can invoke political behaviours of their own in order to protect their own power bases and levy a degree of control over their environment. Management by exception can equally be applicable to followers who are able to utilise reactive behaviours such as over-conforming, passing the buck, ignorance, depersonalising, stretching and smoothing, and stalling in order to achieve this. Laissez faire behaviour therefore can also be appreciated as an impasse between leaders and followers as their potential power resources of one effectively balance out those of the other(s).

### **11.3 Conclusion**

This study is not concerned with a political theory of leadership as a unidirectional model of leadership. It is neither leader-centric nor follower-centric but is concerned with a politically relevant interpretation of the dynamics of leader follower behaviours that are linked in multiple ways. This interpretation goes beyond normative models of leadership that privilege leader voices over the follower population and, in challenging these, achieves its emancipatory intent.

#### **11.4 Limitations of the study**

The goal of this section is to examine the limitations of this study and the research method in order that the significance of the specific contributions to knowledge concerning the dynamics of the leader follower relationship is substantiated. This section specifically relates to the methodology presented in Chapter 4.

Before attempting this study the researcher's understanding of and engagement with critical methods had been limited. Employment experience as a professional manager within the public and private sector for approximately 20 years had, consequently, provided personal management experiences from an exclusively functional perspective. Changes in personal circumstances stimulated a more critical consideration of those management experiences. This compelled an enthusiastic engagement with the aims of the study despite the obvious inexperience being a probable limitation of the study.

Additionally, experiences as a manager may have heavily influenced the way in which the observations and interviews were conducted. Despite remaining conscious of allowing interviewees space to talk but aspiring to be 'playful' in terms of challenging the ideas of the interviewees, thereby provoking some deeper reflections in answer to questions, the prejudices associated with work experiences may have influenced the overall outcome of the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

In establishing an iterative approach to the study of observation-interview-reflection it is believed that concerns related to inclusion of prejudice have been minimised. Thomas (1993) advocates the use of negation at all stages of the research process and, particularly, in the reflective stages. The use of negation is a comprehensive way of challenging potential prejudices as the researcher is forced to come to terms with prejudices and belief that are deeply held about the phenomenon under study. This, of course, creates additional challenges in the pursuit of a rigorous study. The plan of observation-interview-reflection is not always possible for a number of reasons ranging from opportunity of study and enhanced access to personal interest and conflicting chronology. However, where the researcher has been less than rigorous in interpretive attempts, rejection or reappraisal of the empirical materials through an additional reflective cycle occurred. In this way, it is believed that potential prejudices have been reduced.

Furthermore, in order to ensure a level of rigour against the two potential weaknesses highlighted above, support and guidance from supervisors as critical researchers and pre-eminent critical theorist scholars compensate for lack of research experience. In addition, one of the supervisors has extensive experience

of researching within the public sector and is a published scholar on issues of leadership. The literature also supports the researcher's awareness of a wide range of knowledge about the study conducted. Individual experiences as a manager and student provided ample preparation for the fieldwork as engagement with correspondents could be achieved on an informed footing due to a qualified understanding of the materials and the context of the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

From a methodological perspective, it is recognised that there are potential limitations in the study. The treatment of the dynamics in a necessary linear fashion may be considered a limitation, as some of the links and interrelatedness between them are lost. The structure of the presentation of the various dynamics can be construed as being artificial and this is recognised but is considered the most easily understood method of presentation without building in levels of additional meaning that is not intended.

A further limitation may be in the selection of and the interpretations of the empirical material. With reference to the first point there is the potential to suggest that materials selected as illustrations drawn from the body of the empirical material were chosen as they demonstrate a preconceived finding of the study. Clearly, other interpretations based on the entire body of material collected are possible and yet six illustrations have been selected. Those chosen are considered to represent scenarios that are typical of the events that occur within the organisation. Reflection upon the entire body of material was made to ensure this. It is contended within critical theoretical studies that the empirical evidence is not a primary factor of the research and that the materials are surpassed by the depth of critical interpretation that the researcher produces (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

Additionally, the researcher has chosen to include a wide variety of materials in support of the illustration. As above, limitations may be created by associating certain statements with certain illustrations to make connections that do not exist. Also as above, the values of critical reflection act as a counter to the potential limitation, as does the stance the researcher takes in conducting critical theoretical studies in attempting to uncover deeper social structures inherent in human interaction and language. The iterative technique of observation,-interview-reflection ensures that a critical appreciation of the overall process is undertaken (Thomas, 1993).

With reference to the second limitation, a potential exists in the interpretations made. Criticisms that the researcher has drawn interpretations to match personal ontology are potentially valid, as is the call that other interpretations could be made.

From a critical standpoint, additional interpretations that are possible are to be welcomed if they seek to uncover further social structures to provoke debate concerning the phenomenon of leadership. Critical theorists do not express their findings as factual statements concerning an objective reality 'out there', and are more concerned about addressing issues of imbalance and injustice (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) thereby maintaining an element of sympathy for the subjects and focusing on the area of enquiry which reduces potential distortion (Thomas, 1993).

A further potential limitation to the study could be one that is inherent within the research design. A variation of a critical ethnography referred to as 'close reading' was used in this study followed by a reflective interpretation of the material collected. Criticism can be made of this method as it falls short of a full ethnography. In defence of the method, thousands of studies conducted have been undertaken utilising positivist and neo-positivistic methods to produce a body of knowledge that is questioned by those inside the school of research. Alternative methods have been called for (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, 1996; Grint, 2005b; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Thomas, 1993) and this is an attempt to utilise a qualitative method to produce a deeper and more contextually relevant and critical interpretation of the phenomenon under study. To an extent, this is borne out by the findings of the study which were subject to scrutiny by the host organisation before writing up. Furthermore, critical scholars have not produced a codification of critical research method, allowing the process of reflection upon deeper issues such as power and of the process itself to counteract accusations of limitation in design (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005).

And finally, there may be the potential for a limitation related to a lack of generality with concern to the findings. It was not the intention to produce findings that were general across organisations and it is recognised that these findings may be entirely limited to the organisation under study. In response to a lack of generality, a critical researcher would point to the semantic nature of the concept of generality within qualitative studies to demonstrate that generality is not an issue confined to lower or higher levels of proof, as there are not two levels of proof but an arbitrary number of them (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). Only the production of more studies will demonstrate the external validity of the findings achieved. At issue here is eradicating the problem of elevating and reinforcing a normative understanding of leadership and replacing it with an interpretive analysis of the dynamics of an influence relationship that may be considered to be leadership. This has the capacity to inform aspects of the leader follower relationship in other organisational settings (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a).

This chapter has outlined the findings of chapters 5-10 and has brought them together to show how they interact together in influence relationships between

leaders and followers. Finally, an examination of the method and study has made explicit the limitations of the study with respect to the dynamics of the leader follower relationship.



**Part Four**  
**Conclusions**

## **Chapter 12**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the general conclusions drawn from the findings of the study. Recommendations are made and ideas for further research are presented. The chapter is presented in three sections

#### **12.1 General conclusions**

Within this section, conclusions are drawn in relation to the aims of the study stated on page 3. A separate segment deals with each of the four aims, and the extent of achievement related to the aims of the study is contained within the segment.

#### **12.2 Recommendations**

This section relates the findings of the study to the organisation under study and makes recommendations on how a more critical interpretation of leadership can moderate leadership in practice.

#### **12.3 Further research**

This final section outlines areas for consideration that may provoke additional areas of study.

## **12.1 General conclusions**

Within this section, specific conclusions are drawn in relation to the aims of the study stated on page 3. A separate segment deals with each of the four aims, and the extent of achievement related to the aims of the study is contained within the segment.

- **To explore the day to day work experiences of leaders and followers**

The normal work experiences of leaders and followers were observed during the fieldwork. This statement is made credible because of the following four reasons.

Firstly, during the fieldwork the host organisation afforded to the researcher unprecedented levels of access to a variety of people and scenarios. Along with access to people and events came an associated level of access to data, both confidential and otherwise. Information and copies of documents were made available, and no requests for access or information were ever denied. In addition, the researcher made specific requests to the ABC for permission to attend meetings that were already planned and part of the normal work agenda. No meetings and/or events were specifically set up for the researcher to attend. Consequently, it is believed that no meeting or event was stage managed for the benefit of the researcher.

Secondly, although a 'step out' clause was agreed, in principle, should members of the council wish to discuss issues of major confidentiality; on no occasion did any member of the organisation implement this. At all times events occurred in front of the researcher in a manner that suggested that the events were not artificial and that the presence of a researcher had minimal impact on the overall activities of the ABC.

Thirdly, no attempts were made to either hide or prejudice access or information in any way. No documents were screened before being made available and there appeared to be no attempt to script the proceedings.

Finally, experiences of managing in the public sector had supplied an expectation of what comprised normal working practice, as had a close working association with a number of officers, built up over a number of years. From this basis, a reasonable assessment of what comprises normal working practices was possible.

From this, it is safe to conclude that the researcher was able to gain unprecedented levels of access allowing free progress to explore issues as and when they developed.

- **To interpret concepts and conversations concerning the leader follower relationship**

Quality of access provided empirical materials that are representative of the day-to-day working experiences of leaders and followers in the ABC. The empirical material collected led to the development of interpretations which contributed to the overall

findings of the study. The findings themselves, and the scope of the framework subsequently developed, strongly suggest that the credibility of the findings of the study has a strong connective association with practical experiences of the actors in the organisation and, as a consequence, a genuine level of veracity with peoples' work experiences have been assured.

The authenticity of the findings has been verified by the following observations.

Continued maintenance of focus on the area of study, combined with an empathy for the individuals of the organisation, as well as allowing sufficient time to interpret the material through an iterative process, ensured that distortion of interpretation was kept to a minimum (Thomas, 1993). Additionally, a critical interpretation of the materials required the heavy use of negation at all points of the enquiry. The undermining of normative models of leadership required that a rigorous search for alternative credible understandings be undertaken.

A form of negation more akin to proactive disengagement was also used in the researcher's interactions with the actors and the organisation under study. During meetings, workshops and interviews the researcher was frequently asked, as a perceived 'expert' on leadership, for opinions related to leadership and other associated areas. The researcher was mindful of the possibilities of leading interactions at this stage and either declined to comment, deflected the question or answered politically.

The findings were discussed with senior members of the Chief Executive's Unit and the members of the panel accepted the findings of the study as a reflection of the organisation. The panel was initially moderately resistant to the findings explained as a response to the critical platform of the research. It is believed that the panel was anticipating a more functional response to leadership in the organisation and how to develop a more 'leaderful' organisation. Discussion relating to practical examples and the implications of potential recommendations eventually resulted in an amicable conclusion of the meeting.

It is plausible to conclude, therefore, that interpretations made from a critical perspective possess a reasonable level of credibility.

- **To identify and explore the main dynamics which comprise and affect the relationship between leaders and followers**

The study identified six dynamics of the leader follower relationship. These are briefly recapped below.

Organisational Ambiguity - The environment studied is shown to be intensely ambiguous. On the one hand, this has significant consequences for the practice of leadership within

the organisation (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a) and, on the other, ambiguity presents opportunities that may be beneficially exploited by both leaders and followers.

**The Working Environment** – The influence of the central government as leader to the ABC's follower sets the tone of relationships between leaders and followers. The relationship between leaders and followers, both internally and externally, is shown to comprise an ambiguously constrained relationship leading to a practice of leadership that is constricted to consist of an exclusively transactional relationship. The environmental context is important as it informs the relationship of leader and followers engaging in the practice of leadership. An extensive and pervasive bureaucracy typifies the organisational environment, and the associated systems of scrutiny and monitoring of all aspects of the ABC's operation compel leaders and followers to become skilled exploiters of self and information. The identities of leader and followers are, therefore, highly variable, dependent upon the context facing each individual (Collinson, 2003, 2006).

**Acquiring, and Utilising Resources** – Leaders and followers in the ABC replicate the transactional basis of the leader follower relationship between the central government and the ABC. The negotiated basis of the relationship has as its central focus the distribution and acquisition of resources. It is the holding and utilisation of resources that forms the basis of power and control within the organisation (Collinson, 2005).

**Symbiosis** – Leaders and followers are shown to work in union in the pursuit of resources. The positions of both constituent parts of the relationship are, to some extent, dependent upon the other (Knights & Willmott, 1992). Leaders require followers as they in themselves are resources but they are the primary method of resource utilisation. Followers need leaders as they form the basis for resource allocation. Powerful leaders hold the most resources. In the case of the ABC this is shown to be the Elected Membership and the Chief Executive's Unit. A close association with either or both groups may result in additional resources, usually commensurate with career advancement.

**Political Behaviour and Activity** – There are intense and pervasive levels of politics and politicking within the ABC. This is a result of a political arena drawing people with a political will toward it. Politically skilled individuals are those that gain most resources in the shortest period. Political skill is considered to be paramount in successfully thriving within the organisation (Ferris et al, 2007).

**'Playing the Game'** – This dynamic is a form of political activity but stands alone in terms of construct integrity. Gamesmanship is in essence the use of behaviour that may be detrimental to other groups or individuals in the organisation (Mintzberg, 1985). It is, essentially, going beyond established rules to exploit a system of non-sanctioned

behaviours in order to benefit self, possibly to the detriment of other groups and individuals.

Whilst other dynamics may well exist, the truth criterion of establishing objective reality was not a major concern for this study. If additional dynamics are to be discovered such as dynamics that contradict those proposed here, they should be welcomed as they possess the capacity to build a better foundation for understanding leadership and continuing in the emancipatory process of critical research (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006a).

In addition, the conclusions have allowed for more propositions to be made about the leader follower relationship and this leads, in particular, to the discrediting of the normative view of leadership and of followers as a homogenous and docile grouping.

In the first instance, followers are neither a compliant nor a docile grouping of individuals. They can be skilled manipulators of self and information and have the independence to search out their own objectives. Followers have an independent agency not considered in traditional conceptualisations of leadership.

Secondly, the relationship between leaders and followers is virtually transactional in its entirety. The transformational element of leaderships is shown to be a very fragile construct, mired in rhetoric and very difficult to practice. The transformational proportion of leadership has been institutionally overplayed to the detriment of understanding related to the transactional components of the leader follower relationship.

Thirdly, the study of leadership as an influence process cannot be approached as something that is only defined in positive terms. This comprises only half of the leadership conundrum as certain behaviours can result in something that is perhaps not intended but, ultimately, is demonstrated to be detrimental and damaging. Calling it something else to protect leadership is tantamount to conceptual eugenics.

Fourthly, leader and followers do not act in convenient dyads or controlled groups; they act in organisational settings that are ambiguous and prescriptive in equal measure. The historical context is crucial in appreciating the impact the wider environment may have on the behaviour of leaders and followers.

Lastly, leader and follower relationships incorporate a substantial amount of politicising, political behaviour and gamesmanship.

- **To utilise the interpretations to suggest a framework of the dynamics of the leader follower relationship from a critical perspective**

A framework for the dynamics was developed and explored. The study showed how the various dynamics were related to aspects of ambiguity, power/control and politics. The organisation studied was shown to be deeply ambiguous, as sources of ambiguity were derived from factors related to concepts of service; most notably definitions and

practicalities of service, aims and objectives of services, and evaluation of service effectiveness (Alvesson, 2001). It was shown that a number of working practices, both historically entrenched and added recently as a response to the ongoing reform of central government, also contributed sources of ambiguity. Finally, the leader follower relationship was also shown to provide further additional sources of ambiguity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a). These are derived from the gap between aspiration and the practice of leadership and from the conflation of identities referred to here as informal leaders and calculable followers (Collinson, 2005). Whilst these two identities are practiced, they are not the only identities that leaders and followers are able to adopt dependent upon the context at the time. Multiple identities create ambiguities and anxieties that promote the manipulation by individuals of their social-selves and of information (Collinson, 1994, 2003, 2006). Followers are able to act in ways that are consistently surprising to leaders. This is also observed in leaders who are able to act in ways that cause alarm amongst followers. Both leaders and followers are able to discriminate in their actions towards others.

Aspects of power and control were explored and related to ambiguity within the organisation. From a leadership perspective the relationship comprised an almost exclusively transactional relationship. Transactionalism was confirmed to be comprised of a heavy emphasis upon the negotiation of rewards in turn for support and performance. Leaders offered reward in turn for follower support. Followers require leaders, as they are the primary holders of resources; conversations occurred concerned with resources that comprise the central focus of the reward structure mentioned above. The acquisition and utilisation of material and symbolic resources was of central importance to both leaders and followers as this equates with power in the organisation (Collinson, 2005).

It has been traditional to view issues of power and the establishing of control as a tactic associated with the management population. Control is very closely related to issues of consent and seen as a fundamental contribution to the efficient workings of the organisation. However, as consent is considered a legitimate practice of leaders, so displays of dissent are seen as an illegitimate. Organisations can be seen as a network of interrelated power structures and relationships and, as power is present, so will resistance be in close attendance. The favouring of one constituent part of the leadership over the other, however, underestimates the independence of follower agency, and fails to take into account that meaning is co-constructed and that power relations are interdependent (Knights & Willmott, 1992). Leader and followers were shown to act jointly in the pursuit of additional resources, and in the acquisition of more power and control. In asserting their own agency, followers will withdraw their support for leaders where there is a discrepancy between the reward and the expectation of that reward. As a

consequence of the withdrawal, followers may engage in covert forms of dissent and will utilise opportunities to find other leaders with which to connect.

Acting as a bridge between ambiguity and issues of power is the use of political behaviour. The organisation under study demonstrated widespread and powerful levels of political behaviour. Despite argument to the contrary, political behaviour is shown to be a normal part of organisational functioning that includes both political behaviour designated as sanctioned and non-sanctioned (Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001) Non-sanctioned political behaviour was seen to be more relevant to the production of gamesmanship (Mintzberg, 1985; Morgan, 1997). The rules of games are created as a product of historical precedent, as the actions of leaders may legitimise non-sanctioned behaviour over time. Nevertheless, there is an element of risk-taking in practicing games.

Both leaders and followers are able to utilise ambiguity inherent in the organisational system and the leader follower relationship to develop better access to more resources. Political behaviour is utilised in equal measure by both leaders and followers, which is seen as a naturally occurring product of diversity of interest. Leader and followers negotiate their relative position within a framework of available resources. Both populations are shown to be capable of politically exploiting the ambiguity of the environmental context to gain additional resources and commensurate levels of power.

Contrary to many traditionally held views concerning leadership, this framework of dynamics as outlined above necessitates that the nature of leadership, as theorised in its normative guise, be challenged. The study shows that leadership is neither a static nor a robust phenomenon. It is asserted here that much of the opinion concerning leadership is derived from a system of ideology that asserts the value of leadership as an organisational feature contributing to organisational performance. Such views contribute in turn to the notion of leadership as an asymmetrical influence relationship in which leader voices are shown to prevail, rendering followers as blank slates to be influenced by leaders. As such, the very concept of leadership contributes to the imbalances of the influence relationship favouring as it does the opinion and perspectives of leaders who are in turn able to use the status of leadership to assert their own levels of control. The study balances the power relations inherent in the leader follower relationship and demonstrates a capacity to inform the leader follower relation in other organisational situations.

Additionally, despite an increase in the appreciation of political behaviour as an organisational feature and the popularity of studies concerning leadership there are very few attempts to relate politics to leadership (House & Aditya, 1997), regardless of both being, demonstrably, influence relationships. This appears to be symptomatic of leadership as part of an ideology as, where politics are considered in studies, the political



behaviour practiced is unquestionably posited in a favourable light. In such cases, the theoretical development comprises a politicised theory of leadership.

Moreover, a number of studies have alluded to a relationship between leadership and politics (Ammeter et al, 2002; Ferris & Judge, 1991; House & Aditya, 1997; Mintzberg, 1985), without developing the conclusions of their own studies at the risk of polluting the purity of leadership as a construct.

This study challenges the ideological foundations of leadership to conclude that there is a direct correspondence between leadership and political behaviour. This study provides a politically relevant interpretation of the dynamics of the leader follower relationship and concludes that many of the constructs of leadership correspond directly to similar constructs of observable political behaviour.

## **12.2 Recommendations**

The world of the ABC is complicated; nevertheless, to thrive in the maelstrom of dynamics that the ABC represents should not be seen as impossible. The organisation is demonstrably successful. The city region within its remit has seen unprecedented levels of development and growth. A hitherto industrial city has redesigned its economy and reshaped its landscapes to represent some of the very best of 21<sup>st</sup> century UK. By the imposed auditing structure, the ABC holds a four-star rating, only one of a handful to do so. In other words, the organisation is, by any criteria, successful. The officers and members who exist within the complexities of the organisational apparatus demonstrate a level of competence and skill - there is no sense of impending organisation collapse and disaster that the dynamics of the organisation may otherwise suggest.

A critical appreciation of leadership is particularly relevant to organisations such as the ABC. Recommendations that arise directly from the conclusions of this study are as follows.

1. Attempts to assert the value of leadership within the public sector have had variable results. Despite this, the central government continues to state that leadership has an intrinsic value to public sector performance. It is possible to utilise the findings of this study to deflect the central government's demands for continued investment into normative leadership development.
2. Awareness of the findings of this study can influence a greater understanding of the fabric of the organisation. The findings demonstrate that there are alternative ways of viewing the organisation that would enlighten individuals as to the rationale behind certain events. It is entirely

feasible that exposure of practices would instigate some degree of internal reform and provide fresh impetus for the involvement of worker committees and the trade union movement.

3. A demonstration of the inadequacies of functionalism in all its guises provides a balance to the continued encroachment of managerialism into the public sector. Alternative methods of appreciating the models of operation within the public sector are required to guard against the simplistic and overtly rational mistakes that have been made in the past.
4. The political bias of the organisation is ingrained and unlikely to be successfully challenged. The utilisation of politics, however, can deliver more equality in relationships throughout the organisation. The principal obstacle for this occurring is the clear precedent that the formal policies and procedures are a drain on resources and serve to maintain a status quo, as opposed to liberating people from bureaucratic dominion. Political activity from skilled practitioners needs to be engaged on a macro and a micro level. Lobbying of ministers may prove effective, as would a reappraisal of internal systems, to ensure that there is a fit with those that have to operate them.
5. The challenge of gamesmanship activities has two clear advantages. The first provokes individuals to recognise the extent of behaviour in terms of its debilitating effects on others and, effectively, reintroduces the realm of the social into a technocratic environment. The second allows for a more ethical form of leading and following to be instigated that may form the basis for a more inclusive and dynamic form of leadership (Western, 2008)

### **12.3 Further research**

Very few studies have been conducted that use a critical ethnographic methodology on organisational issues beyond the traditional focuses of the critical theoretical research school. Fewer have been conducted from an empirical perspective that allows a more radical interpretation of areas traditionally considered to be beyond reproach, such as organisational leadership. Areas for further research, therefore, are as follows.

1. Further studies of a critical nature interpreting leadership in similar organisations in order to corroborate the findings.

2. Studies conducted in an attempt to uncover the relationship of political activity with political arenas. Is diversity of interest prevalent in all organisations and how does this manifest itself?
3. Studies designed to develop further the critical method and, in particular, that of the 'close reading' variation of critical ethnography.
4. Additional studies of a similar nature conducted on a wider variety of organisations.
5. An extension of the current study with wider temporal scope to assess the influence of the dynamics over time.
6. A further study that focuses on the activities of followers at junior levels of the hierarchy.
7. An in-depth study into organisational 'gamesmanship'
8. A further study conducted to explore the commonalities of political activity and leadership

The scope for further research into this field is extensive. It is hoped, however, that this study will have gone some way to uncover the dynamics of an influence relationship between leaders and followers often referred to as leadership. More so than this, however, it is hoped that this study has served to illustrate the inadequacies of dominant leadership models and, thus, serves to emancipate both leaders and followers from its associated expectations of practice and performance.

## References

- Alimo-Metcalfe, B. & Alban-Metcalfe, J. 2001. The development of a new transformational leadership questionnaire. *The Journal Of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 71: 1-27.
- Alimo-Metcalfe, B. & Alban-Metcalfe, J. 2004. Leadership in public sector organizations. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Leadership in Organizations: Current Issues and Key Trends*: 173-202. London: Routledge.
- Alimo-Metcalfe, B. & Alban-Metcalfe, J. 2005. Leadership: Time for a New Direction. *Leadership*, 1(1): 51-71.
- Alvesson, M. 1993. *Cultural Perspectives on Organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alvesson, M. 1996. Leadership studies: From procedure and abstraction to reflexivity and situation. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 7(4): 455-485.
- Alvesson, M. 2001. Knowledge work: Ambiguity, image and identity. *Human Relations*, 54(7): 863-886.
- Alvesson, M. & Deetz, S. 2006a. *Doing Critical Management Research*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. & Deetz, S. A. 2006b. Critical Theory and Postmodernism Approaches to Organizational Studies. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, & W. R. Nord (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, 2nd ed: 255-283. London: Sage Publications.
- Alvesson, M. & Sköldbberg, K. 2005. *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. & Sveningsson, S. 2003a. Good Visions, Bad Micro-Management and Ugly Ambition: Contradictions of (Non-) Leadership in a Knowledge-Intensive Organization. *Organization Studies*, 24(6): 961-988.
- Alvesson, M. & Sveningsson, S. 2003b. The great disappearing act: Difficulties in doing "leadership". *Leadership Quarterly*, 14(3): 359-381.
- Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. 2001. *Making sense of management: A critical introduction*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. 2002. Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5): 619-644.
- Ammeter, A. P. Douglas, C, Gardner, W. L, Hochwarter, W. A, & Ferris, G. R. 2002. Toward a political theory of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13(6): 751-796.
- Anderson, B. 1986. Thatcherites who would prefer to be without Thatcher, *The Spectator*.
- Antonakis, J. & Atwater, L. 2002. Leader distance: a review and a proposed theory. 13(6): 321-357.
- Ashforth, B. A. & Lee, R. T. 1990. Defensive behavior in organizations: a preliminary model. *Human Relations*, 43: 621-649.
- Avolio, B. 1991. *The Full Range of Leadership Development: Basic and Advanced Manuals*. Binghampton, New York: Bass, Avolio and Associates.
- Avolio, B. J. Gardner, W. L. Walumbwa, F. O. Luthans, F. & May, D. R. 2004. Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(6): 801-823.
- Barzelay, M. 2001. *The New Public Management*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Bass, B. 1960. **Leadership, psychology and organizational behavior**. New York: Harper.
- Bass, B. 1998. **Transformational leadership: Industrial, military, and educational impact**. Mahway, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bass, B. 2000. The Future of Leadership in Learning Organizations. **Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies**, 7(3): 18-40.
- Bass, B, & Avolio, B. 1990. **Transformational leadership development: Manual for the multifactor leadership questionnaire**. Palo Alto, Calif: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Bass, B. M. 1985. **Leadership and performance beyond expectations**. New York: Free Press.
- Bass, B. M. 1999. Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. **European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology**, 8(1): 9-32.
- Bass, B. M, & Avolio, B. J. (Eds). 1994a. **Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bass, B. M, & Avolio, B. J. 1994b. Shatter the Glass Ceiling: Women May Make Better Managers. **Human Resource Management**, 33(4): 549-560.
- Beyer, J. 1999. Taming and promoting charisma to change organizations. **The Leadership Quarterly**, 10(2 ): 307-330.
- Blackler, F. 2006. Chief Executives and the Modernization of the English National Health Service. **Leadership**, 2(1): 5-30.
- Bolman, L. G, & Deal, T. E. 1991. **Reframing organizations: artistry, choice, and leadership**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, .
- Boyne, G. A. 1996. The Intellectual Crisis in British Public Administration: Is Public Management the problem or the Solution? **Public Administration**, 74(4): 679-694.
- Boyne, G. A, & Chen, A. A. 2007. Performance Targets and Public Service Improvement. **Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory**, 17(3): 455-477.
- Bresnen, M. J. 1995. All Things to all People? Perceptions, Attributions and Constructions of Leadership. **The Leadership Quarterly**, 6(4): 495-513.
- Brown, J. 1998. Public Service Ethics - A Viewpoint from Local Government. **Public Money & Management**, 18(1): 7-8.
- Bryman, A. 1992. **Charisma and Leadership in Organizations**. London: Sage.
- Bryman, A. 1996. Leadership in Organizations. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds), **Handbook of Organization Studies**: 276-292. London: Sage.
- Burns, J. M. 1978. **Leadership**. New York: Harper & Row.
- Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. 1979. **Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis**. London: Heinemann Press.
- Calás, M. B. & Smircich, L. 1991. Voicing Seduction to Silence Leadership. **Organization Studies**, 12(4): 567-602.
- Campbell, C. & Wilson, G. 1995. **The End of Whitehall: Death of a Paradigm**. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chaleff, I. 2003. **The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and For Our Leaders**. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

- Chemers, M. M. 2003. Leadership effectiveness: Functional, constructivist and empirical perspectives. In D. van Knippenberg, & M. Hogg (Eds), **Leadership and power: Identity processes in groups and organizations**: 5-17. London: Sage.
- Cole, M. 2001. Local Government Modernisation: The Executive and Scrutiny Model. **The Political Quarterly**, 72(2): 239-245.
- Collins, J. 2001. **Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't**. London: Random House.
- Collinson, D. L. 1994. Strategies of resistance: power, knowledge and subjectivity in the workplace. In J. M. Jermier, D. Knights, & W. Nord (Eds), **Resistance and Power in Organizations**. London: Routledge.
- Collinson, D. L. 1999. Surviving the rigs: Safety and surveillance on North Sea oil installations. **Organization Studies**, 20(4): 579– 600.
- Collinson, D. L. 2003. Identities and Insecurities: Selves at work. **Organisation**, 10(3): 179-189.
- Collinson, D. L. 2005. Dialectics of Leadership. **Human Relations**, 58(11): 1419-1442.
- Collinson, D. L. 2006. Rethinking Followership: A post-structuralist analysis of follower identities. **The Leadership Quarterly**, 17(2): 179-189.
- Common, R. K. 1998. Convergence and transfer: a review of the globalisation of new public management. **International Journal of Public Sector Management**, 11(6): 440-450.
- Conger, J. A. & Kanungo, R. A. 1987. Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. **Academy of Management Review**, 12: 637-647.
- Conger, J. A. & Kanungo, R. A. (Eds). 1998. **Charismatic Leadership in Organizations**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dansereau, F. 1995. A dyadic approach to leadership: Creating and nurturing this approach under fire. . **Leadership Quarterly**, 6(4): 479-490.
- de Bono, E. 2000. **Six Thinking Hats**. London: Penguin.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds). 1994. **Handbook of Qualitative Research** (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Digman, J. M. 1990. Personality Structure: Emergence of the five factor model. **Annual Review of Psychology**, 4 Palo Alto, CA Annual Reviews: 417-440.
- Dionne, S. D. Yammarino, F. J, Howell, J. P, & Villa, J. 2005. Substitutes for leadership, or not. **The Leadership Quarterly**, 16(1): 169-193.
- du Gay, P. 2006. Machinery of government and standards in public service: teaching new dogs old tricks. **Economy and Society**, 35(1): 148-167.
- Dunleavy, P. & Hood, C. 1994. From Old Public Administration to New Public Management. **Public Money and Management** 14(3): 9-16.
- Efficiency Unit. 1988. Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps. London: HMSO.
- Elcock, H. 2005. Public Administration: British Art Versus European Technocracy. **Public Money & Management**, 25(2): 75-81.
- Eisenberg, E.M. (1984) Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. In Eisenberg E.M. (2007) **Strategic Ambiguities Essays on Communication**, Organization and Identity. Sage. Thousand Oaks, California

- Fairholm, G. W. 1993. **Organizational power and politics: tactics in organizational leadership**. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Ferris, G. R. & Judge, T. A. 1991. Personnel /Human Resources Management: A Political Influence Perspective. **Journal of Management**, 17(2): 447-488.
- Ferris, G. R. Treadway, D. C. Perrewé, P. L. Brouer, R. L. Douglas, C. & Lux, S. 2007. Political Skill in Organizations. **Journal of Management**, 33: 290-321.
- Fiedler, F. E. 1967. **A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness**. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fry, G. K. 1988. The Thatcher Government: The Financial Management Initiative and the 'New Civil Service'. **Public Administration** 66(2): 1-20.
- Gabriel, Y. 1999. **Organizations in Depth**. London: Sage.
- Gemmill, G. & Oakley, J. 1992. Leadership - An Alienating Social Myth. **Human Relations**, 42(1): 13-29.
- Giroux, H. (2006) 'It was such a handy term'; Management Fashions and Pragmatic Ambiguity. **Journal of Management Studies** 43:6 1227-1260
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. 1967. **The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research**. New York: Aldine.
- Golden-Biddle, K. & Locke, K. 1993. Appealing work: an investigation of how ethnographic texts convince. **Organization Science**, 4(4): 595-616.
- Greenaway, J. 1995. Having the bun and the halfpenny: Can old public service ethos survive in the new Whitehall? **Public Administration**, 73(3): 357-374.
- Greenleaf, R. K. & Spears, L. C. 2002. **Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness** (25th anniversary edition). New York: Paulist Press.
- Greenwood, R. & Hinings, B. 2006. Radical Organizational Change. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, & W. R. Nord (Eds), **The Sage Handbook Of Organization Studies**, Second edition 814-842. London: Sage.
- Grint, K. (Ed.). 1997. **Leadership, Classical, Contemporary and Critical Approaches**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grint, K. 2005a. Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership'. **Human Relations**, 58(11): 1467 - 1494.
- Grint, K. 2005b. **Leadership: Limits and Possibilities**. Basingstoke, Hampshire Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hales, C. 2002. Bureaucracy-lite and continuities in managerial work. **British Journal of Management**, 13: 51-66.
- Hardy, C. & Clegg, S. R. 2006. Some Dare to Call it Power. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, & W. R. Nord (Eds), **The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies**, 2nd ed: 754-775. London: sage.
- Haslam, S. A. & Platow, M. J. 2001. The Link Between Leadership and Followership: How Affirming Social Identity Translates Vision Into Action. **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin**, 27(11): 1469-1479.
- Hersey, P. & Blanchard, K. H. 1984. **Utilizing human resources. Management of organizational behavior** (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, .
- Hodgson, D. 2005. 'Putting on a Professional Performance': Performativity, Subversion and Project Management. **Organization**, 12(1): 51-68.
- Hogg, M. A. 2001. A Social Identity Theory of Leadership. **Personality and Social Psychology Review**, 5(3): 184-200.

- Hood, C. 1995. The "New Public Management" in the 1980's: Variations on a Theme. ***Accounting Organizations and Society***, 20(2/3): 93-109.
- Hough, L. M. 1992. The "Big Five" personality variables - construct confusion: Description versus prediction. ***Human Performance***, 5: 139-155.
- House, R. J. 1971. A path-goal theory of leader effectiveness. ***Administrative Science Quarterly***, 16: 321-339.
- House, R. J. 1977 A 1976 theory of charismatic leadership. In J. G. Hunt, & L. L. Larson (Eds), ***Leadership: The cutting edge***: 189-207. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- House, R. J. & Aditya, R. N. 1997. The Social Scientific Study of Leadership: Quo Vadis? ***Journal of Management***, 23(3): 409-473.
- Iedema, R. Rhodes, C. & Scheeres, H. 2006. Surveillance, Resistance, Observance: Exploring the Teleo-affective Volatility of Workplace Interaction. ***Organization Studies***, 27(8): 1111-1130.
- Jackson, B. & Parry, K. 2008. ***A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book About Studying Leadership***. London: Sage.
- James, W. 2004. The impact of corporatisation and national competition policy: An exploratory study of organisational change and leadership style. ***Leadership & Organization Development Journal***, 26(4): 289-309.
- Jermier, J. M. & Kerr, S. 1997. Substitutes for leadership: Their meaning and measurement: Contextual recollections and current observations. ***The Leadership Quarterly***, 8(2): 95-101.
- Johnson, G. & Scholes, K. 1999. ***Exploring Corporate Strategy*** (5th ed). Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Kan, M. M. & Parry, K. W. 2004. Identifying paradox: A grounded theory of leadership in overcoming resistance to change. ***The Leadership Quarterly*** 15(4): 467-491.
- Kelemen, M. & Rumens, N. 2008. ***An Introduction to Critical Management Research***. London: Sage.
- Kellerman, B. 2004. ***Bad Leadership: What is it, How it Happens, Why it Matters***. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kellerman, B. 2008. ***Followership: How followers are creating change and changing leaders***. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Kelley, R. E. 1992. ***The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow, and Followers Who Lead Themselves***. New York: Doubleday.
- Kelley, R. E. 2004. Followership. In J. M. Burns, G. R. Goethals, & G. J. Sorenson (Eds). ***Encyclopaedia of leadership***: 504- 513. Oxford: Sage Reference.
- Kerr, S. & Jermier, J. 1978. Substitutes for Leadership: Their Meaning and Measurement. ***Organization Behaviour and Human Performance***, 22: 374-403.
- Kets de Vries, M. 2003. ***Leaders, Fools and Impostors*** (2nd ed). New York: iUniverse, Inc.
- Kirkpatrick, I. 1999. The Worst of Both Worlds? Public Services without Markets or Bureaucracy. ***Public Money & Management***, 19(3): 7-14.
- Knights, D. & Willmott, H. 1992. Conceptualizing leadership processes: A study of senior managers in a financial services company. ***Journal of Management Studies***, 29(6): 761-782.
- Kuhn, T. S. 1990. ***The structure of scientific revolutions*** (3rd ed). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



- Labour's Programme. 1982. The Labour Party. 1982.
- Layder, D. 1994. ***Understanding Social Theory***. London Sage.
- Lee, J. W. Rainey, H. G. & Chun, Y. H. 2009. On Politics and Purpose: Political Salience and Goal Ambiguity of US Federal Agencies. ***Public Administration***, 87(3): 457-484.
- Local Government Act. 1988. c29, 1 June 1988: The Stationery Office, Whitehall.
- Local Government Changes for England Regulations. 1994. 12th April 1994.
- Local Government Planning and Land Act. 1980. c65, 13 November 1980: The Stationery Office, Whitehall.
- Lord, R. G. & Brown, D. J. 2001. Leadership, values and subordinate self-concepts. ***The Leadership Quarterly***, 12(2): 133-152.
- Lord, R. G. DeVader, C. & Alliger, G. M. 1986. A meta-analysis of the relation between personality traits and leadership perceptions: An application of validity generalization procedures. ***Journal of Applied Psychology***, 3: 402-410.
- Lundin, S. C. & Lancaster, L. C. 1990. Beyond leadership: The importance of followership. ***Futurist***, 24: 18-22.
- Meindl, J. R. & Ehrlich, S. B. 1987. The romance of leadership and the evaluation of organizational performance. ***Academy of Management Journal***, 30: 91-109.
- Meindl, J. R. Ehrlich, S. B. & Dukerich, J. M. 1985. The romance of leadership. ***Administrative Science Quarterly***, 30: 78-102.
- Mintzberg, H. 1982. If You're Not Serving Bill and Barbara, Then You're Not Serving Leadership. In James G. Hunt, U. Sekaran, & C. A. Schriesheim (Eds), ***Leadership: Beyond Establishment Views***. 239-259. Schriesheim: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Mintzberg, H. 1985. The Organization as a Political Arena. ***Journal of Management Studies***, 22(2): 133-154.
- Mintzberg, H. 2004. ***Managers not MBA's***. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Morgan, G. 1997 ***Images of Organisation***. (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks: : Sage. .
- Morgan, G. & Smircich, L. 1980. The case for qualitative research. ***Academy of Management Review***, 5(4): 491-500.
- Mumby, D. K. 2005. Theorizing Resistance in Organization Studies: A Dialectical Approach. ***Management Communication Quarterly***, 19(1): 19-44.
- Napier, B. J. & Ferris, G. R. 1993. Distance in organizations. ***Human Resource Management Review***, 3(4): 321-357.
- Noordegraaf, M. & Abma, T. 2003. Management by Measurement? Public Management Practices Amidst Ambiguity', . ***Public Administration***, 81(4): 852-871.
- Orr, K. & Vince, R. 2007. Traditions of Local Government ***Public Administration*** 87(3): 655-677.
- Pandey, S. K. & Wright, B. E. 2006. Connecting the Dots in Public Management: Political Environment, Organizational Goal Ambiguity, and the Manager's Role Ambiguity. ***Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory***, 16(4): 511-532.
- Parker, L. D. & Guthrie, J. 1993. The Australian Public Sector in the 1990s: New Accountability Regimes in Motion. ***Journal of International Accounting Auditing & Taxation***, 2(1): 59-81.

- Parry, K. & Bryman, A. 2006. Leadership in Organizations. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, & W. R. Nord (Eds), **The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies**: 447-468. London: Sage.
- Parry, K. W. 1998. Grounded Theory and social process: A new direction for leadership research. **The Leadership Quarterly**, 9(1): 85-105.
- Pfeffer, J. 1981. **Power in organizations**. Boston: Pitman.
- Pollitt, C. 1993. **Managerialism and the Public Services: The Anglo American Experience** London Macmillan.
- Porter, L. Allen, R. W. & Angle, H. L. 1981. The politics of upward influence in organization. In B. Staw, & L. Cummings (Eds), **Research in Organizational Behavior**, Vol. 3. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Potter, E. H. Rosenbach, W. E. & Pittman, T. S. 2001. Followers for the times: Engaging employees in a winning partnership. In W. E. Rosenbach, & R. L. Taylor (Eds), **Contemporary Issues in Leadership** (5th edition). Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Power, M. 1999. **The Audit Society**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pratchett, L. & Wingfield, M. 1996. Petty Bureaucracy and Woollyminded liberalism? The changing ethos of local government officers. **Public Administration**, 74(4): 639-656.
- Raelin, J. 2003. **Creating Leaderful Organizations**. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Raelin, J. 2004. Don't bother putting leadership into people. **The Academy of Management Executive**, 18: 131-135.
- Reeves, E. 1970. **The Dynamics of Group Behavior**. American Management Association Inc.
- Reicher, S. Haslam, S. A. & Hopkins, N. 2005. Social identity and the dynamics of leadership: Leaders and followers as collaborative agents in the transformation of social reality. **The Leadership Quarterly** 16: 547-568.
- Rhodes, R. A. W. 1991. The New Public Management. **Public Administration**, 69(1): Introduction.
- Rickards, T. & Clark, M. 2006. **Dilemmas of Leadership**. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Rosenau, J. 2004. Followership and discretion. **Harvard International Review** (Fall): 14-17.
- Rost, J. 1993. **Leadership for the Twenty-First Century**. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Sayer, A. 2000. **Method in Social Science**. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge.
- Seteroff, S. 2003. **Beyond leadership to followership**. Victoria: Trafford.
- Shamir, B. 1995. Social Distance and Charisma: Theoretical Notes and an Exploratory Study **Leadership Quarterly**, 6(1): 19-47.
- Smircich, L. & Morgan, G. 1982. Leadership: The Management of Meaning. **The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science**, 18(3): 257-273.
- Stech, E. L. 2004. Psycho-dynamic approach. In P. G. Northouse (Ed), **Leadership Theory and Practice**: 235-263. London: Sage.
- Stodghill, R. M. 1948. Personal factors associated with leadership, A survey of literature. **Journal of Personality**, 25: 35-71.

- Strang, S. E. & Kuhnert, K. W. 2009. Personality and Leadership Developmental Levels as predictors of leader performance. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(June): 421-433.
- Thomas, J. 1993. *Doing Critical Ethnography*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.
- Thompson, F. & Miller, H. T. 2003. New Public Management and Bureaucracy Versus Business Values and Bureaucracy. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 23: 328-343.
- Toynbee, P. 2009. These rottweilers do the work of the Tories for them, *The Guardian*. London: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/feb/10/taxpayers-alliance-public-sector>.
- van Kippenberg, D. van Kippenberg, B. Cremer, D. D. & Hogg, M. 2004. Leadership, self and identity: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15: 825-856.
- Van Wart, M. 2003. Public-sector Leadership Theory: An Assessment. *Public Administration Review* 63(2): 214-228.
- Watkins, P. 1989. Leadership, Power and Symbols in Educational Administration. In J. Smyth (Ed), *Critical Perspectives on Educational Leadership*. Lewes, East Sussex: Farmer Press.
- Western, S. 2008. *Leadership: A Critical Text*. London: Sage.
- Yukl, G. 1989. Managerial Leadership: A Review of Theory and Research. *Journal Of Management*, 15(2): 251-289.
- Yukl, G. 1999. An evaluative essay on current conceptions of effective leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8: 33-48.
- Yukl, G. 2002. *Leadership in Organizations* (5th edition). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Zanzi, A. & O'Neill, R. M. 2001. Sanctioned Versus Non-sanctioned Political Tactics. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 13(2): 245- 263.
- Zoller, H. M. & Fairhurst, G. T. 2007. Resistance leadership: The overlooked potential in critical organization and leadership studies. *Human Relations*, 60(9): 1331-1361.